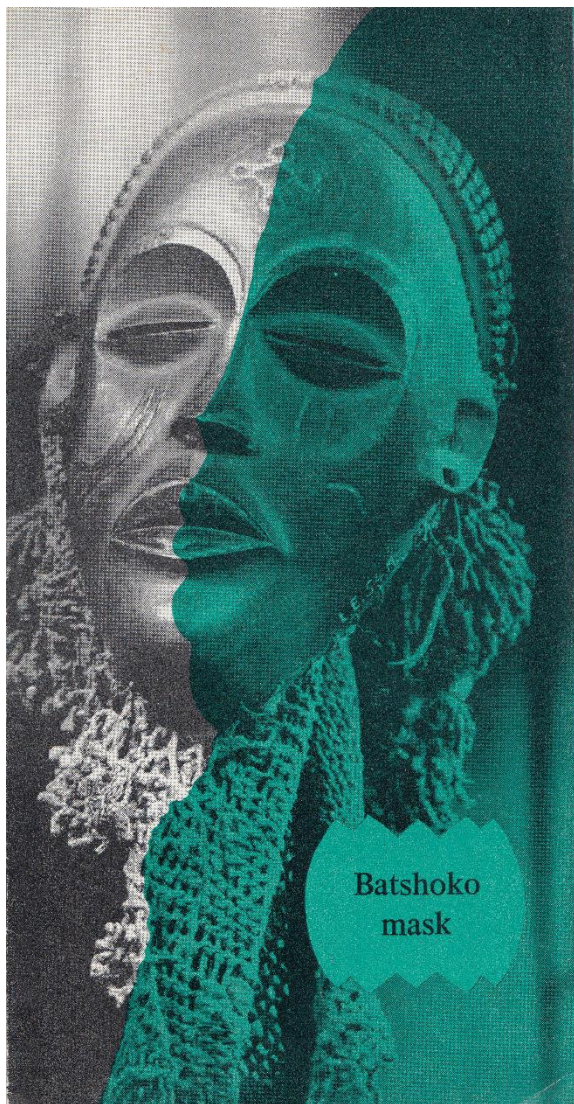


The Musée de la vie indigène in Leopoldville*

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(fig. 1 Tourist folder from the fifties with a mask from the collection of the Museum ¹⁾)

Summary

The tourist guide for Belgian Congo and Rwanda Urundi for 1958 begins the tour of Leopoldville in the *Musée de la vie indigène* (MVIL). In that era, it is one of the main attractions of the colony's capital. With the independence of 1960 the institution is handed over to the Congolese government. In the matter of a few years the staff sell out the museum to collectors and dealers, thus provoking the permanent closure of the MVIL. The present article takes the reader back to the heydays of the museum which opened its doors in 1936. We become acquainted with the initiators and their ambitions, and situate their Leopoldville enterprise within the colonial cultural policy of the time. Subsequently we focus on the construction of the collection and walk you past the masterpieces of this lost museum.

Samenvatting

De Toeristische Gids voor Belgisch Congo en Ruanda Urundi laat in 1958 de stadswandeling doorheen Leopoldstad beginnen in het Musée de la Vie Indigène (MVIL). Het is op dat moment één van de belangrijke trekpleisters van de koloniale

hoofdstad. Met de onafhankelijkheid in 1960 wordt de instelling overgedragen aan de Congolese staat. In een paar jaar tijd verkoopt het personeel de collectie van het museum uit aan verzamelaars en handelaars en het MVIL sluit voorgoed de deuren. Dit artikel neemt u mee terug naar de hoogdagen van het museum dat in 1936 van start gaat. We maken kennis met de initiatiefnemers en hun bedoelingen en situeren hun Musée de la Vie Indigène in Léopoldstad in het koloniale cultuurpolitiek van die tijd. Daarna reconstrueren we de opbouw van de verzameling en wandelen met u langs de topstukken van dit verdwenen museum.

Résumé

Pour son édition de 1958 le Guide du voyageur au Congo Belge et au Ruanda Urundi commence sa visite de Léopoldville au Musée de la vie indigène, un des hauts lieux touristiques de la capitale coloniale. En 1960 le musée est cédé à l'état congolais. Il ne faut au personnel que quelques années pour bazarder la totalité de la collection et de procéder à la fermeture du musée. Cet article vous fait revivre la période faste du musée, qui ouvrit ses portes en 1936. Nous faisons la connaissance des

initiateurs, nous découvrons leurs ambitions et nous situons leur initiative dans le cadre de la politique culturelle coloniale de l'époque. Ensuite nous évoquerons la politique de collection du musée, ainsi que la collection elle-même en nous promenant parmi les pièces phares de cette collection aujourd'hui disparue.

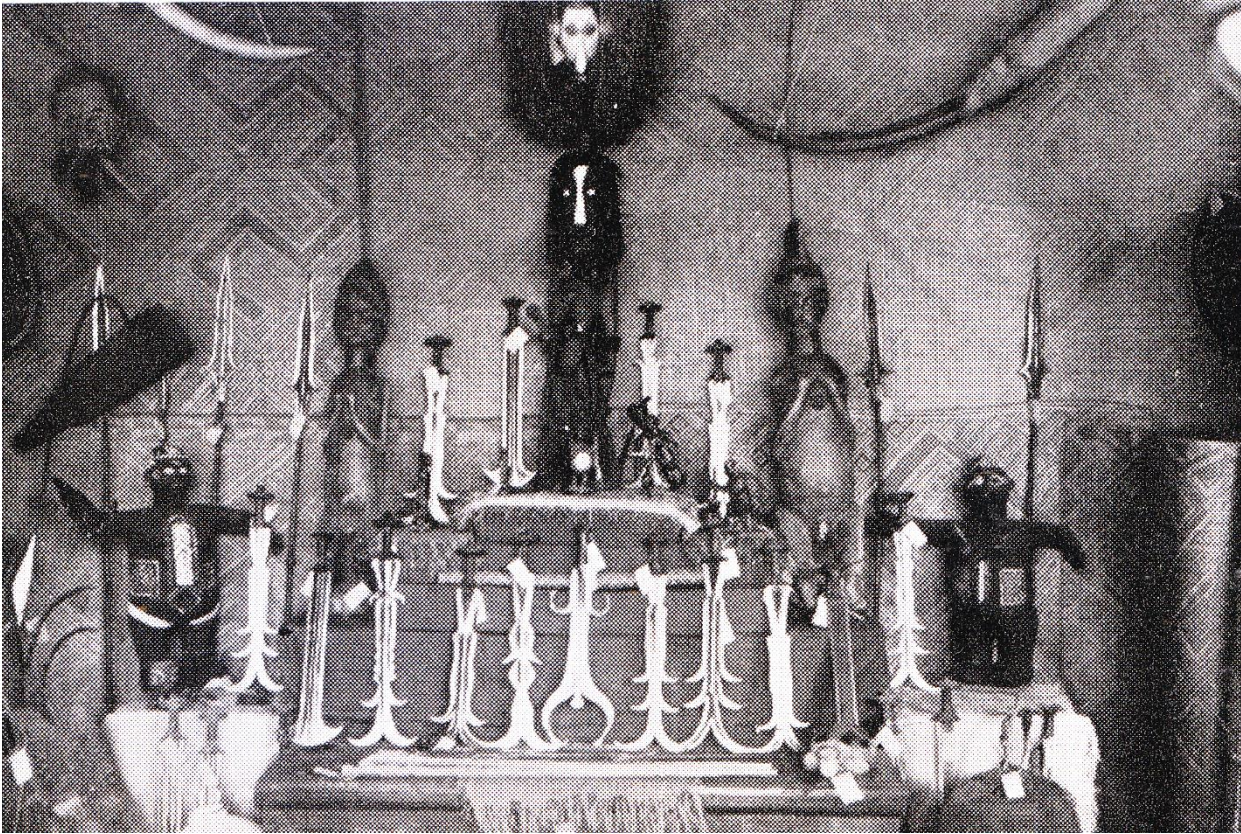
The cultural policy in Belgian Congo

The first ever public museum in Congo to exhibit Congolese culture was founded in 1936 in Leopoldville by colonial amateurs and volunteers. Belgium - the « mother nation »- some decades earlier had already built its Congo museum in Tervuren, and boasted additional smaller, semi-private collections. In Tervuren, thousands of ethnographica were collected, preserved and examined, and even the notion that Africa produced art began to seep through.

In Congo itself on the other hand, a cultural policy is not the first point on the colonial authority's agenda. Colonial politics, education and the political discourse in general take a rather distant, not to say condescending stance towards traditional culture: they favour acculturationⁱⁱ. Civil servants are recommended to keep their distance. As it is, the average colonist's interest in traditional culture is limited, and his knowledge of it rarely exceeds the *Patriote Illustré*'s digest of itⁱⁱⁱ.

Only after World War II will the central government try to gain control over the museum initiatives that have mushroomed everywhere, independent of the colonial administration. Missionaries for instance, as part of their conversion activities^{iv}, had initiated their ethnographic collection at the beginning of the twentieth century. Private persons began collecting as well. But neither of them had any museum ambitions or aimed at a larger public. By 1935 in Brussels, in the margin of the Ministry of Colonies, the Colonial Office founds the Commission for the Protection of Indigenous Arts and Crafts (COPAMI). It is an advisory board without any real power in which tenors from the administrative, academic and museum world ponder upon Congolese and colonial culture and heritage. Even the name itself is an illustration of the debate about the distinction between art and craft. What is art, what is craft? What is worth preserving and how should it be done? In which direction should Congolese arts and crafts develop, and what role ought the colonial authorities to assume in this development? It is an ideology-determined debate, which often follows the rifts of Belgian politics and the balance of power in the "motherland"^v. The first important act of COPAMI is the decree of August 16th, 1939 and the establishment of a Committee for Landscapes, Monuments and indigenous Movable Heritage (Commission des Sites, Monuments et Meubles de facture indigène), which was hoped to stop the dreaded decline of traditional culture. The decree in the first place protects colonial attractions and natural landmarks, such as the inscriptions by the Portuguese explorer Diego Cao in 1484 in the Congo estuary, the remains of Stanley's camp in Bodo, or the historical baobab of Boma. The local protection of indigenous movable heritage or "objects of local origin with historical, prehistorical archaeological, ethnographical or artistic importance" remains accessory^{vi}.

And yet there are those colonists in Congo who cherish Congolese art, and fear the downfall of traditional culture. Brussels only blabbers, they take action. In 1935, a number of enthusiasts in Leopoldville found the *Association des Amis de l'Art indigène* (AAAI). They come from the better colonists' circles and can rely on an extensive network within the colonial administrative and religious institutions and the economic world. Their aim is "to protect and favour the local arts and crafts through their artists and craftsmen and their genuine ethnographic and folkloric creations". The means for achieving this is establishing workshops for craftsmen, participating in exhibitions with artisan products *and* the founding of museums for the Congolese ethnographic and cultural heritage. Under the aegis of the central committee of the AAAI of Leopoldville, the colony's capital, provincial divisions will sprout all over Congo, run by enthusiastic volunteers championing the safeguard and promotion of the indigenous art of their region. By the time they celebrate their first lustrum, the number of friends already exceeds 600^{vii}.



(fig.2 the AAI's stand at the 1935 exhibition) ^{viii}

The struggle against the decline of traditional culture

The AAI just out of its shell already has its own stand at the Provincial Exhibition in Leopoldville of July 1935 (fig.2). There's a miscellaneous display of artisan production (ebony and ivory sculptures, earthenware, plaited and woven textiles, ironwork) and ancient objects. At the same time this embodies the dual mission they have set themselves: stimulating the production and sale of new art and crafts production on the one hand, and on the other the collection, preservation and exhibition of old, traditional and hence genuine material and immaterial culture ^{ix}. For this purpose a permanent museum is the instrument *par excellence*. It could help bridge the gap between traditional art and the new generation of artists and craftsmen, and at the same time confront the colonists in a positive way with authentic Congolese culture and local art traditions. In their view the enemy of genuine art is the soulless assembly line work which the colonists easily buy. The AAI views the rise of this modern commercial handicraft with a jaundiced eye: the disruption of traditional economic and societal structures brought about by colonization would take away the fertile soil for traditional art production, and what is left would be contaminated by western taste, and be perverted into tourist market kitsch. The old examples in the museum should show the way to new generations of craftsmen and artists. Sales channels such as the museum shop and exhibitions would create a market for the better works ^x.

In practice, from the beginning the Leopoldville AAI supports a large number of workshops all over the province, encouraging as many old masters as they can to transmit their knowledge, and stimulating the next generation to work with the traditional techniques and forms of their people. They distribute "Fetischen of Tooverbeelden (Fetishes or Power Figures)", the book by Joseph Maes the then curator of the ethnographic department of the Tervuren Congo museum ^{xi}. Or they lend old examples for the younger generation to use as reference. The famous maker of figurative pottery Voania of Muba had died already by the time the Friends start their initiative in that region

in 1937, but they show photographs of works by the master to serve as models for the local workshop. In Mayombe they stimulate the production of traditional wickerwork, and workshops are set up for the engraving of calabashes after pre-1900 examples. In the Tumba workshop, the Friends try to stop the use of aniline in artisanal production, as it is a western colouring agent. In the region of Lake Leopold II they show young potters shards from old earthenware which is then meticulously imitated^{xii}.

The colonial authorities appreciate this work by the AAAI friends. In their reports to parliament they state that the AAAI's efforts for the encouragement of local arts and crafts yield interesting results^{xiii}. However, gradually it will dawn upon some that the indiscriminate copying of old models would eventually prove sterile and disastrous for the Congolese art scene. Artists have to change with their time. Even within the AAAI there will be debate, after WW II, concerning this resolutely conservative approach which disregards the radical changes in society^{xiv}. In the fifties the AAAI will become increasingly appreciative of modern Congolese painting and sculpture along western concepts, to such extent that their Leopoldville museum will consistently and regularly open its doors to temporary exhibitions of such contemporary work^{xv}.



(fig.3 Museum room in the Utexléo buildings, 1938)^{xvi}

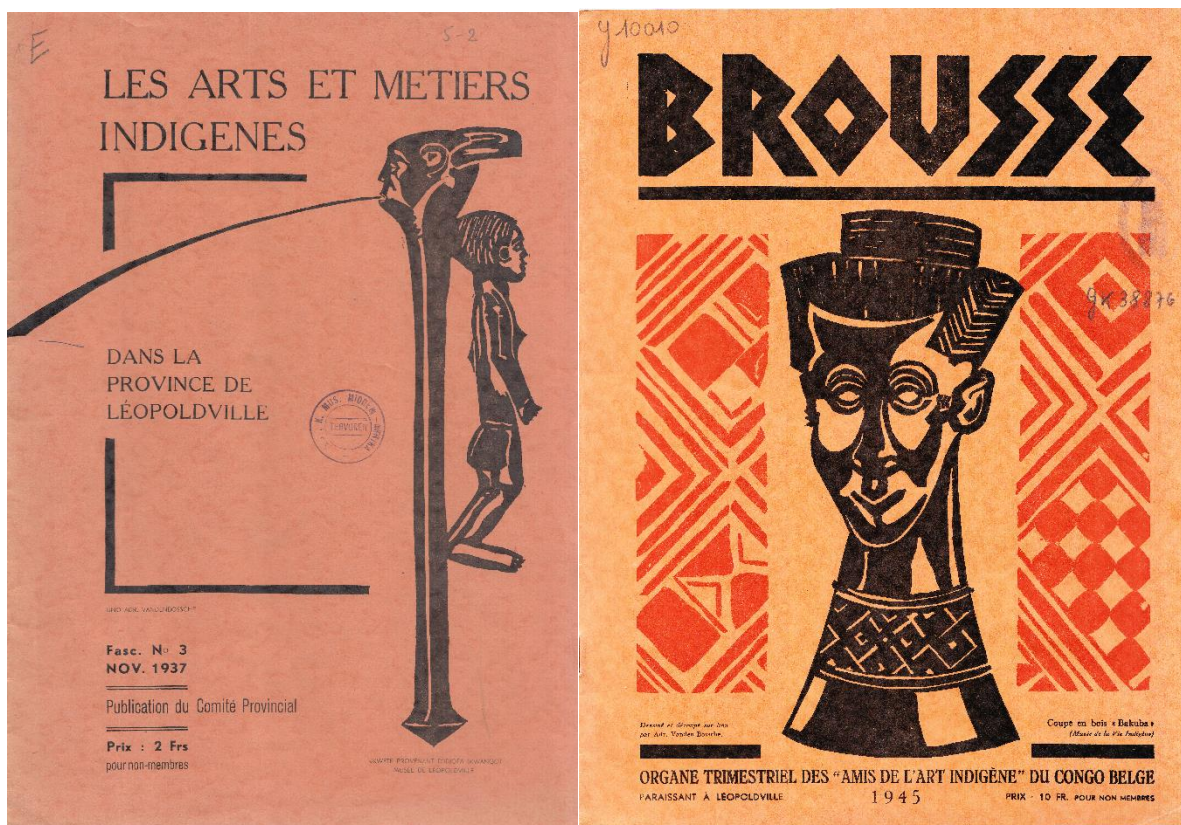
The start of the MVIL

On the 15th of March 1938 the friends of the AAAI welcome their first visitors at the solemn opening of the *Musée de la vie indigène*^{xvii}. They obtained the premises from Utexléo, a textile factory producing pagnes. According to the initiators it is high time but not yet too late “to collect and preserve for the black race the increasingly scarce remains of an art that is being over-assiduously preyed upon by foreign museums and collectors”. Harsh words indeed, and an explicit indictment of the plundering by extraneous parties in the past: the AAAI become the champion of

the Congolese heritage, which has to remain *in situ*. Amongst the audience at these inaugural speeches, apart from the AAAI members and sympathizers, are the representatives of the Utexléo factory, who put the buildings at their disposal, the Leopoldville administration and top-level civil servants. Pierre Ryckmans, governor-general of Belgian Congo from 1934 to 1946 and honorary president of the Friends addresses the gathering: “Tervuren has served science; let Leopoldville guard the treasure for the black race.” And he continues to express the hope that the people of Congo will one day be grateful that the witnesses of their past have been safeguarded in their own country. The above quotation clearly illustrates the firm intention to no longer be ruled by foreigners, not even by the highly respected Congo museum of Tervuren. There will be not much love lost between the two institutions (MVIL and Tervuren). The creation of museums with backing from the colonial government does not always meet with approval in Belgium, and the relations with the museum in the “motherland” will become rather strained indeed.

The MVIL starts with very limited means and relies on volunteers. One of the driving forces behind it is Jeanne Maquet-Tombu, who is also one of the founding members of the AAAI in Leopoldville, and who will later become a member of COPAMI in Brussels. She is an artist, a doctor in history of the arts and in archaeology, a collaborator of the *Union des Femmes Coloniales* and the wife of Marcel Maquet, who is to become governor of the Leopoldville province. Hence she has a very extensive network in both Brussels and Leopoldville, and is a pivotal figure of the MVIL, both for the content of its mission and for its organization^{xviii}. The first curators of the museum are painter Walter Vigneron and after him writer and civil servant René Tonnoir. Soon the organizationist Adrien Vanden Boscche takes over as curator – with René Tonnoir staying on a while as director of the museum – and will turn the initially modest initiative into a full-fledged museum. He begins the inventory of the collection and tackles the problem of the conservation of the museum pieces.

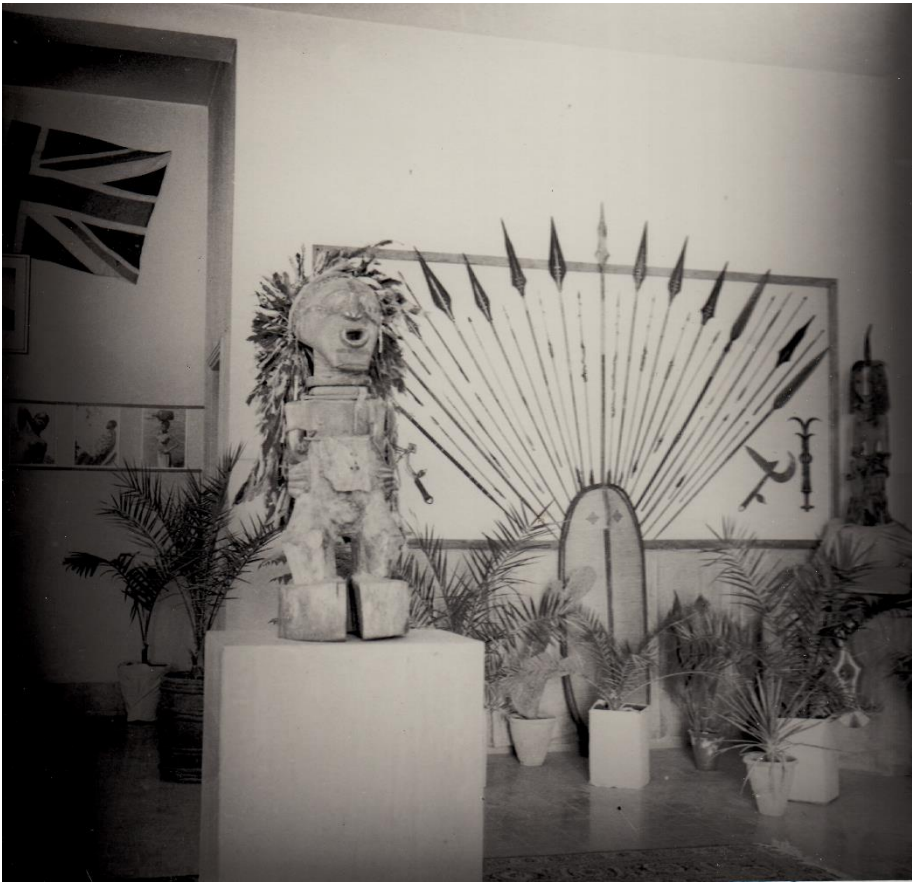
The MVIL as an ethnographic museum focuses, as was customary at that time, on the material culture of Congo. The objects are sorted by administrative region and peoples (fig.3): that way every colonist, civil servant or missionary can easily locate the material culture of the region he works in. Yet from the outset the museum aims to be more than a mere collection. There is a will to build it into a scientifically founded, public oriented museum, which can stand comparison with the museums in the “mother nation”. To this end a library is brought together, and a very extensive photographic archive. Also lectures are being held. Every item has its descriptive index card with bibliography, and the majority of pieces has been photographed. A remarkable aspect is the trouble the MVIL goes through in order to trace, where possible, the name of the maker of the object. In this they are dead opposite to the prevailing idea of tribal, anonymous art^{xix}.



(Fig.4 Cover of *Les Arts et Métiers Indigènes dans la Province de Léopoldville*, 1937, fig. 5 cover of *Brousse*, 1945)

The AAAI's publications not only run articles on plastic arts, but also on the often neglected oral culture and music. From 1936 onwards the Friends publish their magazine *Les Arts et Métiers Indigènes dans la Province de Léopoldville* (fig.4) followed in 1939 by *Brousse* (fig.5). They are to become the mouthpiece of the *Comité Central des Amis de l'Art Indigène* for the Friends all over Congo, not only those of the Leopoldville province^{xx}.

When war breaks out in 1940 Utexléo steps up production to do its bit for Belgium, so the MVIL has to pack and go. Local authorities put the restaurant of the former Hotel Stanley at 3, Queen Astrid Avenue at their disposal, in the centre of town. Jeanne Maquet-Tombu has managed to rake in part of the proceeds from a post stamp series issued for the benefit of the Leopoldville zoo, which enables the MVIL to pay the museum's installation^{xxi}. The museum shop as well, which sells artisanal products, has a good turnover and provides a substantial revenue. The Hotel Stanley is more spacious, and most of the items are no longer exhibited on shelves but in display cases, thanks to director Adrien Vanden Bossche (fig. 24 and 25). The classification along administrative provinces and districts is maintained. However, there now are thematic showcases as well, with items from different areas covering one subject, e.g. music, textile, earthenware, which makes it possible to compare various techniques and their results. Material culture remains the starting point, however. Visitors are given more background information via texts, labels and dioramas, and by figurines and scale models, the museums' habitual vulgarization devices at the time. One of those, by the painter Marques, is an evocation of everyday life in a Kuba village, with blacksmiths, potters and woodcarvers under the palm trees^{xxii}. The new museum comes equipped with an ethnologic laboratory and a reading room. Furthermore, once or twice a week visitors can view the films Adrien made during his inland trips with the Kuba, Shi and Pende people, featuring dancers, sculptors, the manufacturing of *velours de kasai* and a marriage celebration^{xxiii}. The museum also boasts a workshop where Congolese craftsmen work wood and ivory and decorate calabashes which are then sold in the museum shop^{xxiv}. The MVIL is supposed to vacate the premises by 1947 and plans are being made for a brand new museum, a joint enterprise with the city's geologic museum.



(Fig.6 Exhibition of MVIL objects in Jerusalem, 1943)^{xxv}

The Museum on tour

Quite regularly the museum goes *extra muros*. Already in 1938 and in 1939 Adrien Vanden Bossche exhibits some of the prize items in Brazzaville^{xxvi}. A curious episode in the museum's history is the touring of the MVIL's collection in the Middle East during the Second World War. Belgian Congo at that time is militarily present in Egypt and Palestine with its "1st Belgian Congo Brigade Group", an army unit of some 8,000 Congolese soldiers and their white officers. The aim of the exhibition is to meet the local population's curiosity about these military; its ulterior motive is to promote the colony. Belgian colonial policy, the colony's mineral resources, trade and economy are highlighted, as well as Belgian painting in Congo. And much room is provided for 'l'art nègre'^{xxvii}. At the invitation of the Belgian chargé d'affaires in Cairo, Mr Scheyven, Vanden Bossche ships the cream of the MVIL collection in 40 wooden crates (8,000 lbs) to Cairo. They are exhibited as the 'Art Colonial Belge' in the *Grand Palais de l'Agriculture*. The objects are shown in borrowed showcases, ordered by region and people. The centre of the main hall is occupied by three large panels with spears and other arms. The side aisles show work by the photographers Frédéric Dubus, André Cauvin and Casimir Zagoursky. There is also a stand where Mrs. Scheyven and some of her charming friends sell Congolese artisan products. Other domains like geology, industry and agriculture take up the first floor. The Egyptian press is wildly enthusiastic about this "beautiful collection, presented in such good taste and sobriety...the statuettes, fetishes, tapestry, panels, arms and masks are amazingly interesting..."^{xxviii}. After Cairo the exhibition tours Alexandria, Jerusalem, Damascus and Beirut (fig.6). Lectures are held, films are shown. Adrien Vanden Bossche estimates the total number of visitors at an optimistic 500,000. A staggering success^{xxix}. In the exhibition, pride of place was given to the top pieces of the collection: the large Songye power figure, the

Pende njindafigure, the *niombe* dolls of the Bwende and the *mbawa* and *kakuungu* masks of the Suku and the Yaka. We shall cross their path again shortly.



(Fig. 7 the MVIL Museum room on the Place de la Poste, 1954, Carlo Lamote)^{xxx}

The last move

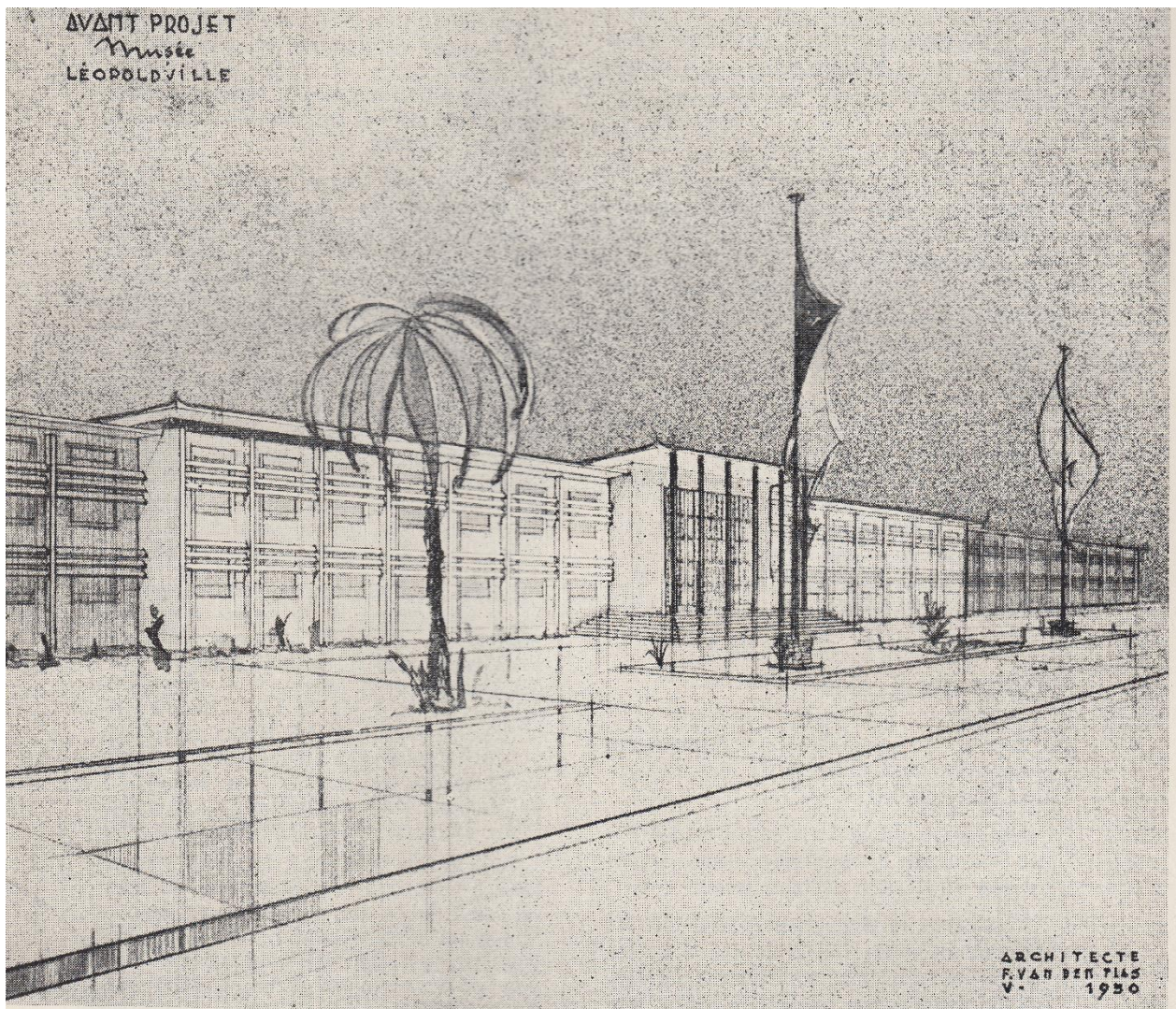
After World War II colonial relations between Congo and Belgium are re-established, and life in the colony returns to normal. The museum does well. By 1946 its collection numbers 4,500 pieces, more than 2,000 of which are exhibited in halls stuffed to capacity. Each object has its own index card full of information, and more than 1,000 of them have their own photograph as well^{xxx}. One of the Friends suggests swapping doubles with American museums, at that time very active in Congo, searching to enhance their own collections. The museum receives an impressive 150 visitors a day that year. Between the 1st of January and the 5th of July 1948 23,256 Europeans and 11,876 Congolese visit the museum. By extrapolation one would arrive at the stunning number of over 60,000 visitors a year for a city of 200,000 inhabitants, five percent of which are Europeans. Among the latter category of visitors there is no doubt a large number of colonists on their way through to their inland destination. But the number of Congolese visitors is striking as well, the more so because the museum is situated in the 'white' part of town. The *Cercle d'étude de la Force publique* is a regular customer, and schools are strongly represented as well. Students not only come from Leopoldville itself: also students at the *Ecole artisanale de Brazzaville* take the ferry to come and visit the MVIL^{xxxii}. However, figures from subsequent years reveal that 1948 must have been an exceptional year and that the number of visitors averages a yearly 30,000.

On the 26th of May 1953 Jean Vanden Bossche (who, after studies at the Ghent University under Frans Olbrechts had succeeded his father as director) shuts the doors of the museum on Queen Astrid Avenue. For the third time the MVIL changes address, to the *Ancien Hôtel des Postes* on the

Place de la Poste. The colonial authorities promise to foot the bill for the conversion of the premises. Small wonder then, that the cream of the administration, headed by the governor-general Léo Pétillon, are present at the inauguration of the new museum on the 6th of May 1954. The permanent exhibition has undergone a thorough face lift. The store rooms are filling up, but the overcrowded halls of the Stanley Hotel with their plethoric dioramas and bulging showcases are replaced by a more sober presentation, occasionally completed by temporary exhibitions. The number of showcases is limited, and each of them contains no more than some twenty objects, illustrative of a particular region (fig. 7, 12, 15, 17 and 23) ^{xxxiii}. The new building has one great disadvantage: the humidity which attacks the collection. To resorb it the bottoms of the showcases are covered with a layer of sand. The exhibition is still organized according to thematic as well as geographic and ethnic areas, as most of the ethnographic museums do at the time. The resemblance with the organization of the Congo museum in Tervuren for instance, is striking. Furthermore, the structure according to regions and peoples also reflects the administrative structures and the vision of the colonial state. Curator Jean Vanden Bossche wants the new museum to fulfil a practical, didactic task by helping the visitors overcome the difficulties they encounter in their respective functions. He also maintains that an ethnographic museum in Africa ought to be “a laboratory of indigenous policy” ^{xxxiv}.

Vanden Bossche emphasizes the museum’s educational mission. He stages lectures on traditional art for the benefit of Belgian colonists to prepare them for their job in the field. Most of these lectures he gives himself, but if he can get his hands on a guest lecturer he will jump to the occasion. In 1956 for instance, professor Frans Olbrechts, the then curator of the Tervuren Congo museum will give a lecture on “plastic styles of the Congo”, and the *Université Libre de Bruxelles* prehistorian professor Mortelmans lectures on Africa as the cradle of mankind. There is also a series of lectures on general ethnography aiming a Congolese audience to familiarize them with their own history and culture. Vanden Bossche’s particular target group here are the ‘*évolués*’, whom he thus hopes to harness as first class informers for ethnologists ^{xxxv}. The debate about the advisability of European influence on Congolese art has taken a new turning in the fifties. The new generation of Congolese artists may well have been groomed to use easel and pallet, they use these imported techniques to paint local subjects in an authentic manner. These painters, together with their Belgian colleagues, are given a forum in the MVIL ^{xxxvi}. Only if they should sell a painting do they have to pay a modest sum for renting the space. So in the fifties the MVIL is not only a museum for traditional art, it also acts as a gallery for modern art. And of a museum for modern art to boot, since curator Adriaan Vanden Bossche wants to include in the MVIL collection a representative painting by every artist – Belgian or Congolese – who exhibits in Leopoldville. The first work to be acquired is a painting from the hand of the Congolese artist Pilipili ^{xxxvii}.

The Hôtel des Postes will be the MVIL’s last location. And yet as early as 1945 ambitious plans exist for a modern museum and in 1950 the AAI’s central committee approves the plans for the new museum building by architect Van Den Plas (fig.8). For their fund raising campaign they appeal to, amongst others, the COPAMI. In 1958 Belgian Prime Minister Gaston Eyskens lays the foundation stone for a “cultural palace” in Leopoldville. Never to be followed by a second stone.



(Fig.8 Draft for a new museum building by M. Arch. Van Den Plas, Brousse, 1951) ^{xxxviii}

The 32 items for the Brussels 1958 Expo

In 1957 Jean Vanden Bossche has 32 pieces from the MVIL collection shipped to the Congo museum in Tervuren. These include choice items such as the Chokwe *pwo* mask, a Kwese mask and a few Kuba and Yaka statuettes. They are meant to be exhibited during the 1958 Brussels World's Fair. Together with Adriaan Claerhout (assistant curator of the City of Antwerp's Ethnographic Museum) and others, Vanden Bossche is a member of the 'Representative Art' committee, a division of the Steering Committee for the Plastic Arts in Belgian Congo and Ruanda-Urundi. Of which the chairman is of course Frans Olbrechts, director of the Congo museum in Tervuren, who is already terminally ill at the time. Vanden Bossche is co-responsible for the selection of traditional art, responsible for the collected items for the exhibition, *and* he is expected to study the relationship between the Congolese artists and craftsmen and the exhibition. Meanwhile he also writes an ethnography of Belgian Congo for the benefit of the visitors of the exhibition. From the beginning Jeanne Maquet-Tombu is an active member of the commission for Applied Arts and Crafts, charged with selecting artisanry and contemporary art to be shown at the World's Fair. It is thanks to her that the Union of Congolese Women can have a stand with products by Congolese craftsmen at the Heysel fair ground.

MUSÉE ROYAL DU CONGO BELGE

TERVUREN, BELGIQUE

SECTIONS :

ECONOMIE
ETHNOGRAPHIE
GÉOLOGIE
HISTOIRE
LINGUISTIQUE
PRÉHISTOIRE
ZOOLOGIE :
 VERTÉBRÉS
 INVERTÉBRÉS
 INSECTES

BIBLIOTHÈQUE
DOCUMENTATION
SERVICE ÉDUCATIF

N. Réf.: E. 60/172

V. Réf.:

70.05.72
Téléphones : 57.43.01
57.43.02

Adresse télégraphique :
Congomuseum, Tervuren

TERVUREN, BELGIQUE 10 aout 1960

LISTE DES OBJETS PROVENANT DU MUSÉE DE LA VIE
INDIGÈNE A LEOPOLDVILLE EXPÉDIÉS EN BELGIQUE POUR
L'EXPO '58 ET REMIS A MR. J. VANDEN BOSSCHE LE
11 AOUT 1960

1.	L.E. 655.S	Statuette avec réceptacle	MAYUMBE
2.	L.E. 196.S	Statuette	TEKE
3.	L.E. 770.S	Statuette	YAKA
4.	SS. N°	Masque polychromé	YAKA
5.	L.E. 158.S	Statuette polychromée	NKANU.
6.	L.E. 15.S	Figurine de quadrupède	NKANU ?
7.	SS. N°	Masque polychromé	SUKU.
8.	SS. N°	Masque-cloche sommé d'une antilope dont la tête manque	SUKU.
9.	L.E. 12.M	Masque-cloche polychromé	PENDE.
10.	L.E. 205.M	Masque	PENDE.
11.	L.E. 21.S	Figurine de roi	BUSHONG.
12.	L.E. 94.S	Statuette	KUBA.
13.	L.E. 505.S	Figurine de personnage assis	KUBA.
14.	L.E. 342.S	Statuette représentant 2 personnages	KUBA.
15.	L.E. 208.S	Coupe anthropomorphe	KUBA.
16.	L.E. 166.M	Masque boom	KUBA.
17.	L.E. 74.S	Figurine	SONGYE.
18.	L.E. 385.S	Statuette de personnage masqué	TSHOKWE.
19.	L.E. 485.S	Statuette en terre cuite	TSHOKWE-LUNDA.
20.	L.E. 54.M	Masque mwana owo	TSHOKWE.
21.	L.E. 39.MO	Siège de chef	TSHOKWE-LUNDA.
22.	L.E. 79.S	Statuette polychromée	JONGA.
23.	L.E. 230.S	Statuette	NGBAKA.
24.	L.E. 228.S	Statuette	NGBAKA.
25.	L.E. 347.S	Boîte à couvercle	BUTA.
		6 figurines en terre du bwani	LEGA
		1 id. bois id.	LEGA

POUR REMISE

A. Maesen

POUR ACCEPTATION

J. Vanden Bossche

Strangely enough, according to the definitive catalogue of the exhibition of Congolese art in Brussels, only two of the 423 pieces on exhibit come from the MVIL collection, viz. two wooden Salampasu masks ^{xl}. From the RMCA file on Expo 58 it would not appear that, contrary to other patrons, the MVIL contribution has never been regarded as significant. In the catalogue Frans Olbrechts thanks the Antwerp museum and the numerous Belgian collectors, but not a word is said about the MVIL's contribution. Moreover, Vanden Bossche's monography for the benefit of the visitors to the exhibition only exists in a typescript version; it has never appeared in print. In 1960 the 32 items are officially handed back to Jean Vanden Bossche, who obstructs their return to Congo, by then an independent country. The transfer list does not mention Salampasu masks (fig.9); and the 32 items will remain in the vaults of the Congo museum in Tervuren. By courtesy of Vanden Bossche they will be on display at several unspecified dates and locations all over Europe. In 1977 they will return to the *Institut des Musées Nationaux de Zaïre* in Kinshasa, as part of the official restitution of objects by the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren ^{xli}.

Every province its museum

They may be volunteers, and they may operate on a shoestring budget, and yet the AAI books remarkable results, and not only in Leopoldville. Almost everything in the way of public ethnographic museums in Congo on the eve of independence is the AAI's work. With the moral support of the colonial government, and with Governor-General Pierre Ryckmans in person as president of the honorary committee, the provincial AAI branches begin to entertain hopes of a museum for each region, next to the already existing mission collections. 1937 sees the opening of the Musée Régional de Thysville with Father De Donder as curator ^{xlii}. The Leopold II museum in Elisabethville is based on the private collection of Francis Cabu, like Jeanne Maquet-Tombu in Leopoldville a founding member of the AAI. Other Elisabethville AAI members rally to the cause in 1938 and considerably enrich the collection, turning it into a public museum in 1942. With the aid of the very prosperous Katangese mining industry architect Strebelle will build a radically modern Culture Centre ^{xliii}. The MVIL says to be very happy with the creation of a *Musée de la vie indigène* in Kinzambi near Kikwit in 1939. It is initiated by the vicar-general for Kwango, Mgr. Van Schingen ^{xliv}. The museum is to concentrate on the culture of the Kwango region. In Costermansville the AAI's provincial committee, the *Cercle Léopold* and the Touring Club join forces in 1938 and start a collection of objects for a museum in the Cercle's board room ^{xlv}. During WW II activity is much reduced. In 1956 the Matadi regional authorities envisage the creation of a museum with a view to the many colonists and tourists arriving there by boat. The MVIL seconds Jean Vanden Bossche to help organize everything. The Stanleyville museum directed by Mrs. Barlovatz and the Coquilhatville museum under the aegis of Mr. Niset open their doors at the end of 1958. The last museum to open in colonial Congo is in Luluaburg, by Paul Timmermans on the 22nd of March, 1959 ^{xlvi}. There had already been ample discussion for a while about whether and how the proliferation of museums should be kept in check. Frans Olbrechts opposes the affiliation of those local museums by Tervuren, and thinks the matter more something for the colonial authorities proper. Other than most COPAMI members he is not favourable to the creation of a parastatal *Office des Musées* to regulate and control local museums and to assure their continuity ^{xlvii}. The debate will continue well into 1959, by which time it will be too late.

The Congo museum of Tervuren views the surge of museums in the colony with a jaundiced eye. Belgian scepticism about local conservation and research of the colony's heritage is almost as old as Belgian colonization itself ^{xlviii}. And yet in principle the relation between the MVIL and Tervuren are not all that bad: even before WW II Jeanne Maquet-Tombu is in constant touch with Tervuren and with curator Joseph Maes. She helps him obtain Congolese pottery they do not have in their own collection ^{xlix}. Tervuren in its turn presents the MVIL with plaster models, although this might well be construed as a hint for them to limit themselves to an educational role. Maes not only writes articles for the COPAMI periodical *Artes Africanae*, but for the MVIL as well. Curator Adriaan

Vanden Bossche donates objects to Tervuren. His son Jean is a former student of Frans Olbrechts, the museum's director, who teaches at the Ghent University. The head of the ethnographic department Albert Maesen contributes to *Brousse*, the MVIL periodicalⁱ. On the occasion of a visit from the Tervuren museum's attaché Olga Boone a garden party is held at the MVILⁱⁱ. The relation between Cabu and the Elisabethville museum with Tervuren, however, is much more strainedⁱⁱⁱ. On the whole the cultural policymakers in Belgium continue to regard the MVIL and associate colonial initiatives as a bunch of amateurs with limited means and a purely educative mission. Which can be perfectly well achieved with plaster casts; the real stuff belongs in Tervuren, is what COPAMI member Frans Olbrechts thinks. He will not stand for any competition, and demands that the collection, conservation and scientific study of Congolese art and ethnography remain the domain of Tervuren^{liii}. This will not stop the enthusiastic amateurs of the MVIL to go for a fully-fledged museum.

The collection of the MVIL

The museum's collection, like that of so many other Congolese museums, has long been regarded as unimportant. This is due in part to the value references and the motives of the critics. The basic philosophy of the museum – protecting and supporting Congolese arts and crafts – means that much attention is given to everyday objects like pottery, textiles, weapons, and to immaterial heritage like oral arts and music^{liv}. This may also be a case of making a virtue of necessity: the classic pieces of art from the area of religion and authority such as old masks, large power figures or important symbols of authority very often are out of bounds for the MVIL, a late entry with limited financial means compared to the great western museums, dealers and collectors^{lv}. The appreciation of Congolese art changes with the times. Under the influence of the art historical approach of Frans Olbrechts in his standard work “Plastiek van Kongo” (which was finished already in 1939 but only published in 1946), the MVIL's most active period is characterized by a strong focus on sculpture by the Kuba, Luba, Kongo and Chokwe all considered producers of masterpieces^{lvi}. The museum does own a *pwo* mask of the Chokwe, inventory number L.E. 54.M. (Fig. 1, fig. 23) which it will repeatedly use as an eye catcher for exhibitions and publications. VIPs are first taken to the show cases with Kuba art^{lvii}. Objects from for example the Kwango and Kwilu river area, a part of the Leopoldville province and so the principal collecting area of the MVIL are far less appreciated by the art historians and collectors of the colonial period. Furthermore, the Belgian museums, and Tervuren most of all, want the most important objects for their own collection. Another reason why the importance of the MVIL collection is underplayed. Today many collectors and museums would be mighty pleased with the Yaka or Nkanu ensembles from the MVIL collection, to name but them. Indeed we do nowadays find objects from the former MVIL collection in important museums all over the world.



(Fig. 10 A view of the identification room of the MVIL laboratory, 1946, Alberto Costa)^{lviii}

The development of the collection

Initially the museum collection consists of donations by the friends themselves and their immediate entourage. Quite often the AAAI members are private collectors, e.g. the Maquet family, Mrs. Ryckmans or Mr. Tonnoir. The events the MVIL organizes create a lot of goodwill with potential patrons. In March 1938 the MVIL has an exhibition of native art from such private collections as the considerable collection of the Svenska Missionförbundet in Kingoy or the Scheut Fathers from Kimpangu^{lix}. There is even a “fétiche de la maternité” on display from the provincial committee of the AAI in Elisabethville. Many members of the board as well give pieces on loan, some of which will be donated after the exhibition. The event is a great success, with many dignitaries visiting it, and many new members being recruited as Friends. Mr. Bomans donates two ivory amulets, a head dress and a Pende mask. The Redemptorist Fathers retrieve their ancient bronze Christs but donate their ‘fétiche tam-tam’; doctor Dimitrieff gives one of his two “fertility fetishes” from the Kongo region. A great jar from Uele is an anonymous gift^{lx}. How those donators themselves came in the possession of the objects is unclear most of the time^{lxi}.

The collection expands quickly. One third issues from gifts which, according to the listings in the AAAI magazine, decrease in number in the fifties compared to the first years of the museum. The rest are acquisitions or objects which museum staff or supporters collect in the field. The AAAI network and its provincial branches which gradually cover nearly the whole territory play an important role. The museum manages to set aside a tiny acquisition budget. It is used to buy items from regions that are not yet represented in their collection, so that by stopping these geographical gaps they will genuinely become a museum for the whole of Congo. However, the means are limited and the prices sometimes steep. The total budget for 1938 amounts to 10.800 francs^{lxii}. The assistant regional governor for Katako-Kombe, A. Dallons based in Stanleyville sends message that for 200 francs he cannot buy both textiles *and* pottery. He asks permission to forget the mats and

concentrate on the latter, and forwards seven jars to Leopoldville *per* Otraco services^{lxiii}. From the reports in *Brousse* it appears that during the following decades missionaries, civil servants and private persons will be sending in items from every corner of the colony. Moreover, both AAAI and museum staff members organize field trips themselves for obtaining material *in situ*. The collection will continue to expand over the next decade to reach a number of almost 7,000 on the eve of independence. Five years later hardly anything will remain.

In principle the complete collection has been inventoried on index cards by 1960 (fig.10). This inventory, together with the collection itself and the museum archives are transferred to the new Congolese state. What remains of this inventory today is not known. Belgian researchers who worked in Kinshasa in the beginning of this century think that there may still remain parts of the original catalogue in the *Institut des Musées Nationaux du Congo*, and have actually seen the last visitors' book in the institute's library^{lxiv}. Other archives may still exist in Kinshasa, but as yet attempts to chart those have been unsuccessful.

So, available source material for reconstructing the collection is scarce. On the one hand there are a number of published items: lists of acquisitions, correspondence by AAAI members and articles in the museum periodicals *Arts et Métiers Indigènes* and *Brousse* or in other magazines, and mentions or reproductions in books or catalogues. Apart from those on the other hand, there is knowledge of a few series of photographs of museum rooms, show cases and individual items. There is a series of interior shots from 1938 in the Utexléo buildings (fig.3) and another from the forties of the museum rooms in Hotel Stanley on Queen Astrid Avenue (fig.24), both from the bequest of musician and Congolese art expert Charly Hénault that are now part of the private collection of photographer Angelo Turconi. The collection also contains a few images of the exhibition which toured the Middle East capitals during the war (fig. 6). The RMCA keeps a picture album of the visit from the Minister of Colonies Albert De Vleeschauwer in 1941, also in the Queen Astrid Avenue site. Two further series featuring objects and interior views are commissions from Inforcongo, the colony's official press agency: one from 1946 in which Alberto Costa participated at the time when the museum is housed in the Hotel Stanley (fig. 10 and fig.25) and another from 1954 of the then brand new museum in the Hotel des Postes shot by Carlo Lamote (fig. 7, fig. 12, fig. 15, fig. 17 and fig. 23). Prints of both series are kept a.o. at the photo archives of the Congolese embassy in Brussels and in the Tervuren Museum. The RMCA archives yield astoundingly scant material concerning the MVIL, which may well be illustrative of the restricted relations between both institutions. There is the correspondence from the early years of the MVIL in which in 1936 the Congo museum asks to forward pottery for an exhibition, and more letters and archives from 1957 concerning the loan and transfer by the Leopoldville museum of objects (fig. 9)^{lxv} but that is all. The Belgian Foreign Office keeps the COPAMI archives which include an MVIL file.



(fig. 11 Yombe figure nr. L.E. 655.S^{lxvi} and fig. 12 Kongo show case, 1954, Carlo Lamote^{lxvii})

The collection of power figures from the Kongo area

The MVIL's first hunting ground is the Leopoldville province. This not only includes the city itself with the district of Central Congo up to Lake Leopold in the east, but also the Lower Congo up till the Atlantic coast in the West and towards the south the Kwango and Kwilu rivers area. The Lower Congo is where the Kongo people (with a *K*) live, such as the Yombe, Solongo and Bwende, who all speak the Kongo language and who share the same culture. Jeanne Maquet-Tombu uses the just published book "*Fetischen of Tooverbeelden uit Kongo*" by curator Joseph Maes in the series Annals of the Congo museum of Tervuren to comment on the collection of power figures from this region that are in the possession of the MVIL^{lxviii}. From the very beginning the MVIL owns a number of small power figures from the Yombe region in the Lower Congo, all measuring between 12 and 22 cm (fig. 11). They are already on show at the AAAI stand at the *Exposition provinciale* in Leopoldville of July 1935. One of them, according to the then current typology by Maes, is a *mbula*, which protects against witches and can be recognized by his "guns", tiny wooden or iron tubes filled with gun powder, and his little keg of gunpowder. Furthermore three "*na moganga* fetishes" which afford protection and cure and can be recognized by their visible genitals, tattoos and filed teeth. Maquet-Tombu also finds a few really high standing works of art, e.g. *nduda* of Nkondo-Yanga origin by the carver Maviasu-Tembo, with very refined nose, lips, neck and backbone, and *mbongo-kulu*, a remedy against belly-ache which has a bloated belly itself, work by Gimbi-Nuni of Banga.

The collection of power figures from the Kongo cultural area is regularly added to. Regional governor Charles Tanghe from Matadi, for instance, in 1939 sends two *nkisi nkondi* figures from the Matadi area and a *nkondi* from Binda to Leopoldville, together with a Solongo stone grave figure^{lxix} (fig.12). These will be joined in 1954 by a wooden Yombe grave figure representing a moustachioed European in morning coat wearing a chain of the Order of the Golden Fleece, a gift from Mr. Delat, director of Socomet (fig.12)^{lxx}. The zoologist and curator of the Royal Museum for Belgian Congo in Tervuren Edmond Dartevelle enriches the MVIL collection with items from the coastal regions amongst which a necklace and a bracelet^{lxxi}. Vice-provincial governor Caps

bestows a bronze *lemba* bracelet with three figures from the Yombe area^{lxxii}. The famed missionary and ethnographer Bittremieux donates four sculpted proverb lids^{lxxiii}. In 1953 Jean Vanden Bossche sets out on a mission himself in the Mayombe region to collect earthenware, calabashes, clothing, textiles and sculptures. On this occasion he visits the mission museum in Kangu, which owns an important collection of Yombe objects, and is presented by the mission's superior with four power figures of which they have doubles. In 1956 Vanden Bossche returns to the Mayombe and Kwango regions to buy ancient and new material intended for the biennial exhibition in the capital. These items are intended to enter the MVIL collection^{lxxiv}.



(fig.13 niombo puppet with number L.E.14.X)^{lxxv}

The Bwende *niombo*

Next to the collection of Kongo power figures the AAAI friends also show two “small” textile *niombo* puppets at the 1935 exhibition (fig.2). They are the handiwork of the Bwende from the Lower Congo area between Matadi and Kinshasa. They are neighbours of the Yombe and the Bembe and form part of the cultural complex of the Kongo peoples. There exist large and small *niombo* figures. The more than life size *niombo* is a kind of shroud reserved for important members of the Bwende society. The corpse of the deceased is first smoked for conservation and then wrapped in numerous layers of tissue, the whole resembling a large puppet up to some 3 meters

high. Particular attention is given to the head. This is a real portrait, with namely the teeth and beard expected to create a likeness. In principle the head is made during the lifetime of the owner and the portrayed person himself is to approve of it beforehand^{lxxvi}. Interior shots of the forties prove the MVIL collection to have boasted at least two heads of a large *niombo* puppets. The smaller puppets function as ancestor figures and are a medium to come into contact with the latter. The MVIL also owns at least two small *niombo* figures, one of which (the 60 cm. high number L.E.14.X) is ascribed to the renowned puppet maker Makoza of Kingoy^{lxxvii}. It has the python motive sewn on its belly. The arms are in a typical position, viz. the right arm pointing upwards and the left one down (fig.13). In their *The Four Moments of the Sun* Thompson and Cornet call it the crossroads or junction posture. A reproduction of the MVIL puppet features in their 1981 book and is at that time still part of the Kinshasa collection under the *Institut des Musées Nationaux de Zaïre* (IMNZ). It is one of the rare pieces from the MVIL collection we find in the IMNZ.



(fig.14 njinda figure, forties^{lxxx lxxviii} and fig. 15 Pende showcase, 1954, Carlo Lamote^{lxxix})

The Pende

The Kwango and Kwilu river area with peoples such as the Yaka, Suku, Nkanu, Kwese, Mbala, Holo, Chokwe and Pende are well represented in the collection. Here the MVIL plays its regional role to the full. On a photograph of one of the rooms in 1938 we see a puppet in the full array of a Pende *minganji* dancer guarding the boys' initiation camp (fig. 15). Next to it stands a beautiful and rare *njinda* power figure of the Pende with all its paraphernalia. *Njinda* figures, originally intended to protect from sorcery, are used to support the Pende struggle against white colonists in the thirties. The figure is expected to turn the white men's bullets into water. The Jesuit and expert on Pende culture Léon de Sousberghe in his epoch-making *L'Art Pende* describes how the figure operates as an oracle and answers questions by leaning left or right. At the end of the consultation it draws with its horn the number of warriors the village has to send to war against the whites^{lxxx}. After the uprising these figures are tracked down and carried off as trophies by the colonial authorities and the missionaries^{lxxxii}. The present one, for instance, was found in 1933 near Niofa in Bandundu and later came into possession of the AAI. In 1935, presented as "the Idiofa fetish", it is the showpiece of the AAI indigenous art stand at the Leopoldville Provincial Exhibition (fig. 2). The statuette, antelope's horn included, stands 106 cm tall and carries the "*couteau de guerre Nkusu, arme rituelle du scarificateur Yul*"^{lxxxii} (fig.14)^{lxxxiii}. Clearly it is considered one of the treasures of the MVIL. It

always holds pride of place for example during the exhibition that tours the Middle East capitals during WW II (fig.6). In his 1958 book *L'Art Pende* Léon de Sausberghe may only include the *njinda* from the former Jesuit Kwangomuseum in Leuven, yet he also reproduces 14 objects from the MVIL collection, such as Mbuya masks and palaver staffs which the clan delegates hold in their hands during negotiations^{lxxxiv}.

The count and countess de Beaufort are amongst the MVIL donators from the beginning. In the forties they give amongst other things an ivory Pende pendant and twelve Pende masks^{lxxxv}. And yet another mask from the MVIL collection figures in the catalogue of the Belgian contribution to the Vatican exhibition of 1950^{lxxxvi}. Furthermore, the expedition by Adrien and Jean Vanden Bossche in 1949 in the Kwango area yields amongst others a further 34 Pende masks used for the *mukanda*, the male initiation school in the Kwango-Kwilu region (fig.15). Shortly afterwards Jean writes an article for *Brousse* and one for *Présence Africaine* featuring eleven illustrations of objects from the MVIL^{lxxxvii}. The museum continues to enhance its collection and every new issue of their periodical – *Arts et Métiers Indigènes*, later *Brousse* – is able to mention recent acquisitions. Musicologist Jean-Noël Maquet, son of Jeanne, studies the music of the Pende in 1954 and brings back with him not only an impressive collection of musical instruments, but recordings as well^{lxxxviii}. According to Léon Kochnitzky the MVIL without the shadow of a doubt owns a most unique collection of miniature Pende masks used as pendants. Unfortunately, the lack of space keeps them locked away in drawers^{lxxxix}.



(fig.16 Yaka figure L.E. 70 - S, Carlo Lamote and fig. 17 show case of the Yaka and the Mbala, 1954, Carlo Lamote)^{xc}

The Yaka and the Suku

When the photographers of Inforcongo, the colony's official press agency, visit the museum in the fifties they take a limited number of close-ups, e.g. from a few interesting Yaka figures (fig.16). The Yaka figure with number L.E. 70 - S for instance, is clearly visible in its show case in the 1954 configuration (fig. 17). It is one of the objects which Vanden Bossche sends to Tervuren in 1957 for the World's Fair and which will remain in Brussels until 1977 before returning to Kinshasa. Boris de Rachewiltz includes it in his book *Arte Africana*^{xci}. Much later the same figure will make its reappearance in Brussels as lot 135 of the auction held on the 5th of June 2008 by the auctioneer Pierre Bergé. The old inventory number has been removed. The article remains unsold then as well

as at a later auction by the same firm on the 7th of November of the same year under number 138^{xcii}. Photographer Carlo Lamote takes close-ups of two more Yaka figures of which we have lost track today^{xciii}. The museum also possesses an “*impressive collection of Yaka figurines and fetishes*” brought together by Mr. Roelandts, district commissary in Kenge^{xciv}. Mr. F. Peigneux donates a Yaka circumcision mask, two fetishes, two adzes, one small ax and a double bell^{xcv}. In the fifties the collection receives yet another ensemble of Yaka figurines and fetishes from the same Mr. Roelandts^{xcvi}. Photographs of late 1938^{xcvii} show classic Yaka and Suku initiation masks collected by amongst others Mr. Van Hecke, agent for the Compagnie du Kasai in Punga. His series of masks are the work of the sculptor Mfunguna of Mbangi and they are named after the animal sculpted on top of the head: *gemba mbambi* is the antelope, *gemba mfumu* the chief, *gemba nzangi* is the mask with the ape and *gemba nkanga* that of the guinea fowl.



(fig. 18 *mbawa* mask, photograph from the 40s , fig. 19 *kakuungu* mask, photograph from the 40s , fig. 20 *kakuungu* mask on exhibit in the museum, 40s photograph ^{xcviii}, fig. 21 field photograph by Hans Himmelheber during his stay in Belgian Congo, with on the left the *kakuunga* mask shown in fig. 20 ^{xcix})

The *mbawa* and *kakuungu* masks

Van Hecke is also the collector of various attributes worn by the boys during the initiation rites, and of a *kakuungu* mask, the red giant mask of the initiationcamp leader ^c. A large horned *mbawa* mask also features in the MVIL collection (fig. 18 and fig. 24). It is used together with the *kakuungu* mask during the *mukanda*. This one is made by Tata Ka Sila, a Menikongo expert in rituals. The *mbawa* mask, together with a Suku mask, is a present from 1938 by anthropologist Dr. Hans Himmelheber. The man height *mbawa* masks are of plaited raffia, and much rarer than the wooden *kakuungu* masks. At the time Himmelheber is gathering information and objects in the area for the Basel and Geneva museums. One of his field photographs shows this *mbawa* mask together with two others, a *kakuungu* and a *mwelu*. Himmelheber is a staunch supporter of the MVIL and has shortly before already donated a Yaka *mwelu* and *matemu* mask, both of which are made of raffia according to the list of gifts ^{ci}. *Matemu* is another name for the *kazeba* or female version of the *kakuungu* mask, strongly resembling the male *kakuungu*. It is therefore normally made of wood ^{cii}. Hans Himmelheber writes an elaborate article on his findings during his field work with the Yaka ^{ciii}. The article shows three masks – the two *kakuungu* and the *mbawa* mask – all of which are at that moment, according to Himmelheber's credits, already part of the MVIL collection ^{civ}. The *mbawa* mask regularly shows up in interior shots of the rooms, as does the *kakuungu* mask which in Himmelheber's article for *Brousse* is reproduced as fig. 8 (fig. 19) ^{cv}. The *kakuungu* mask Himmelheber shows in his article as fig. 7, and which according to the caption belongs to the MVIL cannot be seen on any room photograph whatsoever. Maybe it was stored in the depot as a double. There is one photograph from the forties (fig.20) in which we do see a *kakuungu* mask which can be found on Himmelheber's field photographs from his expedition in Belgian Congo in 1938-1939 (fig. 21) ^{cvi}.

In 1989 the *mbawa* mask from the MVIL collection is sold by the dealer Jacques Hautelet to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts ^{cvi}. The *kakuungu* mask reproduced by Himmelheber in his article in *Brousse* as fig. 8 can often be spotted in room photographs and exhibitions of the 40s and 50s. In the seventies it emerges in Brussels and is bought and sold by three art dealers at the least until it ends up in the Bareiss collection ^{cvi}. The *kakuungu* mask Himmelheber shows as fig. 7 in his article transits via the dealers Pierre Loos (Brussels), Jacques Hautelet (Brussels) and Joel Cooner (Dallas) before ending up in the Bareiss collection, and was subsequently auctioned at Sotheby's in May 2008 ^{cix}. And then there is the *kakuungu* mask which judging from a 40s photograph hangs on one of the walls of the MVIL (Fig. 20). The further career of this mask is a mystery.



(fig. 22 Kwese mask^{cx} and fig. 23 Chokwe show case 1954, Carlo Lamote^{cxⁱ})

Other objects from the Kwango and Kwilu region

The Kwango and Kwilu region has yet other interesting material to offer. The *kimbengedi* mask of the Kwese (Fig. 22) is a gift from Dr. Gabba^{cxii}. The museum has a number of interesting Mbala figures (Fig. 20) , among others those of Father Mols, who had given the museum a.o. “two Bambala fetishes, four Chokwe statuettes, three Kibota statuettes, three Chokwe masks, one Mbala mask, one small axe, one chair, two small knives, five antelope horns”^{cxiii}. A further item of interest is an adze from the Kwango area, which the Mbundu call *nkwete* and the Mbala call *kandu*. The adze is 37 cm high with a 31 cm blade (fig. 4 and fig. 15 below right). According to Marcel Maquet who writes an article about it in the museum periodical it is an ancient object from before the colonization^{cxiv}. The Chokwe are represented as well: the *mwana pwo* mask is considered one of the top pieces (fig. 1 and fig.23). In 1958 it will travel to Tervuren for the World’s Fair and in 1977 it will be returned to Kinshasa. In 1978 it will be stolen from the public rooms of the IMNZ there, to be found back later. In 1982 it will be shown at the Sura Dji exhibition in the *Musée des arts décoratifs* in Paris^{cxv}. In July 1990 it will again disappear from the IMNZ. No trace of it is known today^{cxvi}. In pictures of the fifties Chokwe show case we can make out under the *mwana pwo* mask a typical chair with carved cross bars, next to a *cikunza* mask used at the *mukanda*, the boys’ initiation ritual (Fig. 23). Hans Himmelheber as well bestows a number of Chokwe objects, such as two masks used during circumcision rituals in the village Mavamba in the Kahemba region; a stool or *kangue* from the village of Mwakango and two dignitary staffs of the Suku from the Feshi area^{cxvii}. Jean Vanden Bossche in his article on the Pende^{cxviii} reproduces two caryatid stools and a Chokwe staff and points at the relationship between Pende and Chokwe art.



(fig. 24 Nkanu panels in a museum room, forties)^{cxix}

The Nkanu collection

An extraordinary feature of the museum is its comprehensive collection of Nkanu objects from the Kingana region, which is part of the museum collection from the beginning (fig. 3 and fig.24). Jeanne Maquet-Tombu, who describes the acquisitions in the first issue of *Arts et Métiers Indigènes*, suggests that because this region had only just before been opened up by the first road traversing it makes for a still very active indigenous art when the MVIL starts collecting^{cxx}. The museum owns a very extensive and important series of Nkanu objects with panels from an initiation hut or *kikaku*, figurative pottery, pipe-bowls, and a remarkable collection of healing figures. This ensemble of lively coloured figures is the work of “*chef-féticheur*” Mfumu-Tseban of the village of Kipindi^{cxxi} and were donated by doctor Berest. Mfumu-Tseban received treatment from Berest for a fractured skull and to show his gratitude agreed to sell a series of brand new figures to his former rival. We see *kosi* which cures torticollis, *senga* which helps with giving birth, *makansu* against paralyzed arms, *kwanu* for having thieves confess, *pindi* who protects children, *temina* bringer of knowledge and civilization, and the image of the *mfumu ntadi* or clan head-cum-village chief. *Mwana nkasi* stands for the brother of the “*chef médaille*”. Although these figures often sport European clothes, and the use of colours like grey, yellow and blue exceeds the habitual red, black and white, still these figures are not “*colons*” but images for local ritual purposes. The collection further includes two animal figures, the snake *saw* which helps in case of snake bites and a leopard *ngo* which is supposed to protect cattle against leopards^{cxxii}. The MVIL also owns since 1936 twelve beautiful panels from a Nkanu *kikaku* shrine which are hung high on the museum room

walls. Such a shrine consists of a hut with its front side open. It plays an important role in the *mukanda*, the boys' initiation cycle. The panels are didactic instruments to broach subjects such as sexuality, birth, rebirth, death, and spirits^{cxxiii}. One of the suppliers of objects from the Kongo and Kwanu areas is the famed missionary and anthropologist Van Wing. With his bequest to the MVIL some years later of the polychrome circumcision masks from the Nkanu region the remarkable ensemble is completed^{cxxiv}.



(fig. 25 Lusambo room, 1946, Alberto Costa)^{cxxv}

A museum for all Congo

In accordance with the AAAI's provincial structure the Leopoldville branch initially focuses on the material culture of the Leopoldville province. However, the *Comité Central des Amis de l'Art Indigène* which resides in the capital also plays a coordinating role for the whole colony, and quite soon the MVIL, instead of a provincial museum, aims to become a museum for the whole of Congo. That is why, from 1937 onwards, they begin an intensive hunt for material from other provinces, viz. Kivu, the East Province, Katanga, the Equatorial province and the Kasai. The court art of the Kuba from the Kasai is much valued during the colonial era, and even for the larger public "*the art they produce is among the finest and most original of Central Africa*"^{cxxvi}. A considerable donation from Mr. Preys in 1938 forms the basis for a Kasai room (fig. 25). The museum sets aside another 1000 francs to complete the collection of the region. The collection's lacunae are known and the priorities stated explicitly: 215 francs are set aside for bells, lances, knives, stools and pottery from the Lomela district; 200 francs for textile and earthenware from the Katako –Kombe region. For all of these acquisitions one relies on the expertise of the local AAAI branch. On the occasion of Minister Albert De Vleeschauwer's visit of the MVIL in 1941 the company is happy to linger

around the Kuba show cases. Curator Adrien Vanden Bossche opens the show cases and lets his guests feel a sample of the famous “*velours de Kasai*”. In 1949 Adrien himself sets out for his first mission in the Kuba region. He brings back with him some seventy items for the museum, amongst which twelve cups (fig. 5) and thirteen Ikula parade knives, but also boxes, statuettes, head rests, masks and parade axes ^{cxxvii}. In 1952 he visits the Kuba again. Proudly he poses at the side of the Kuba king and writes an extensive article on the Kuba collection of the MVIL in *Brousse* ^{cxxviii}. From the Congo museum in Tervuren the MVIL had received in 1937 plaster casts of two statues of Kuba kings ^{cxxix}. The originals rank among the top examples of the Congolese art heritage. The MVIL further has a wooden “modern” version of a Kuba king, a gift from Mr. Preys, director-general of Inland Affairs in Leopoldville ^{cxxx}. More interesting, however, is the remarkable figure of a crouched woman, which for Vanden Bossche touchingly illustrates the Kuba’s talent for producing “*d’autres objets aux formes variées*” ^{cxxxi}. The museum also owns a number of typical Kuba masks ^{cxxxii}. And there are the characteristic rubbing oracles, often in the form of a quadruped, and a number of utensils. The Kuba have a tradition of applied art with objects being lavishly adorned with both abstract and figurative motives. The collection also boasts some very nice cephalomorphous drinking cups, boxes for the red *tukula* powder or shaving knives (William Fagg, for instance, the assistant curator of the British Museum at that time, presents them with a *tukula* box and shaving knives ^{cxxxiii}), earthenware and a figurative drum of the “hand of Yolo” type.



(fig. 26 Songye figure, photograph 1943) ^{cxxxiv}

Katanga and the Eastern provinces

Leopoldville may well be the colony’s administrative capital but the economic heart of the country is the Katanga province, with Elisabethville as its centre. There, almost simultaneously with the MVIL initiative, a museum is founded which for its ethnographic collection naturally focuses on the region’s material culture as provided by the Luba and Songye peoples. These are less well represented in the MVIL. The Leopoldville museum has received from Tervuren a plaster copy of the famous bowl bearer carved by the master of Buli of the Luba Hemba ^{cxxxv}. A gift of 2000 francs from commander Holeyman permits the MVIL to acquire genuine objects for its Katanga room. The *piece de résistance* is the large Songye power figure which both in the permanent exhibition and in the one touring the Middle East is used as an eye catcher (fig. 6 and fig. 26). And yet not everyone is convinced of the artistic merits of this work. A visitor of the newly refurbished rooms only sees “*the inevitable fetish..... a crudely sculpted log vaguely representing a human creature, the primitive character of which is only enhanced by the garish colours*

with which it has been smeared..... The gross work strangely contradicts the finely chiselled parade weapons, the perfection of the lines of certain vases, the real and astonishingly life-like facial expression of certain masks.” ^{cxxxvi}. The rooms also have a display of Songye wickerwork from Lusambo. The MVIL activates its network in the Eastern province as well. Thanks to the Bondo based agronomist Mr. De Wulf, who donates some hundred objects, the MVIL is able in 1937 already to open a room dedicated to the Uele region. Mainly these are utensils such as stools, chairs, plates, games, functional wickerwork, a pestle for hides, and music instruments. Another major part of this Uele collection are weapons ^{cxxxvii}. On pictures of Minister De Vleeschauwer’s visit we can

see a show case containing about forty knives from the province of Stanleyville, among which a gift of sixteen knives with ivory handles. At that time weapons are commonly considered as *bric-à-brac*, and there is a booming tourist market for knives of Mangbetu or Songye origin, to name but those. On the whole they are conspicuously present in the museum collection, which has for instance a large collection of sickle knives. The great variety in form allows P. Lenkchevitsh to dedicate a whole article to them in *Brousse*^{cxxxviii}. The museum also owns a set of the notorious leopard fangs of the *aniota* sect with which the assassins of this society maul their victims to make their deed look like the leopard's work^{cxxxix}. Adrien Vanden Bossche himself tours the Kivu province and visits the Lega and Shi peoples. That expedition yields 48 Lega objects, nearly all masks hats and other objects used by the *bwami* society^{cxl}.



(fig. 27 *Eleku sarcophagus*)^{cxli}

The Eleku sarcophagus

The room dedicated to the Coquilhatville province opens in 1938 thanks to three crates with Bwaka objects, a gift from regional governor Mr. Crabbe. They include throwing knives, a straight battle sword, a scimitar, *djangare* coins, pipes for smoking tobacco and hemp, circumcision masks and power figures. Together with these objects a mat by the Topoke people and Ifefo mats from the Basankusu are displayed. The budget he receives from the MVIL in 1938 enables regional governor René Maquet to forward from Lomela a trunk with objects of the Kutu, a Mongo people. It contains 34 pieces of earthenware, two decorative panels, seven small pagnes, three pieces of raffia webbing, eight lances, eight knives, two fetishes, two combs and three toilet articles, for a total cost of 106,5

francs^{cxlii}. The regional governor of Opala sends in three figures of the Lilwa society of the Mbole^{cxliii}. The most exquisite piece, however, and one of the museum's eye catchers is a rare sarcophagus or relic shrine from the former Coquilhatville region, now known as Mbandaka (fig. 7 and fig. 27). Two types of coffin are known in this region: antropomorphous coffins or *efomba* made by the Nkundo and related peoples; and more stylized coffins, supposedly referring to a double canoe, carved by the Eleku, who live near the river. The coffin we see in the picture of the museum rooms is of the Eleku type. It is one of the two shown at an exhibition organized by Father Edmond Boelaert, a colleague of Father Gustaaf Hulstaert in 1940. A press article on the exhibition mentions "*two Boruki coffins, the outlandish appearance and Egyptian character of which leave the best connoisseurs of the country speechless*"^{cxliv}. After the exhibition, to cover its cost, one of the coffins is sold to provincial governor Eugène Henry. The other is said to have left Congo, taken away by a war veteran. Governor Henry donates his to the MVIL and when Minister De Vleeschauwer visits the museum it is already on display. Hulstaert, who as no other has delved into the ethnography of the Mongo region, has the opportunity of studying it and situates its origins in the village of Mpombo in the Eleku region. We have here a non-antropomorphous specimen. Its author is the sculptor Paul Bosenja who, according to Hutsaert, also made the similar sarcophaguses in the RMCA and in the ethnographic collection of the KU Leuven^{cxlv}. But maybe the MVIL was presented with not one but *two* sarcophaguses, one of which may have been an antropomorphous specimen, an *efomba*. The Brousse article about the Coquilhatville exhibition describes: "*the famous Efomba by Mpenjele, the only two other known specimens were donated to the Tervuren museum in 1888 by Commander Van Gele, father of our honorary president. Mrs. Henry has been so kind as to enrich the MVIL collection with this gift.*"^{cxlvi}. The objects referred to here are the famous antropomorphous Nkundo relic shrines Charles Lemaire collected between 1884 and 1887 and which were later donated to the Tervuren museum by Lt. Col. Van Gele. The MVIL acquisition list for 1940 mentions the donation of two coffins: "*one large Boruki coffin of the Ntomba and one antropomorphous Penzele coffin of the Nkundo*"^{cxlvii}. But did the MVIL in actual fact own such a spectacular antropomorphous sarcophagus? If so, there is not one photograph extant to prove it^{cxlviii}.

The end of the museum

In 1961 Jean Vanden Bossche says goodbye to the museum and to the country. Congo is prey to civil wars in which the UN also are entangled. The USA and the USSR use the region as a Cold War theatre. The MVIL visitors' book shows a steady decline in Belgian visitors, and an increase in Americans^{cxlix}. Central authority disintegrates; anarchy and money-grabbing asphyxiate the institutions which the colonial government had transferred to the autonomous nation Congo. Such is also the lot of the MVIL, of which the collection is for the most part sold off to amateurs and dealers. In 1962 Mr. Rogers is an attaché of the American embassy in Brazzaville and he visits the Leopoldville museum a few times. After his transfer to the US embassy in Brussels he tells Albert Maesen, then curator of the ethnography department of the Tervuren museum, that those in charge of the Kinshasa museum are actually offering the museum pieces to interested buyers^{cli}. In 1963 Maesen's assistant Huguette Van Geluwe pays a visit to an Antwerp collector. The collection is a load of recent, inferior stuff, except for five items. The collector has no qualms in telling her that he bought those five ancient items - Pende, Suku, Ngbaka and Woyo masks – from an employee of the MVIL. He even shows her a letter in which this employee says that "*they can do business*". Traces of the museum indexing labels are still clearly visible^{cli}. On a sarcastic note Van Geluwe adds that the collector was anxious to know if and when Tervuren would return its collection to Congo.



(Fig.28 Yaka figure L.E. 2023-S)

Joseph Cornet as well labels the transfer of the museum to the Congolese authorities as disastrous, and in 1970, when he is nominated assistant director of the IMNZ, he cannot but admit that practically everything has vanished from the museum^{clii}. When Albert Maesen visits the IMNZ in Kinshasa in 1977 and takes stock of the collection he has to conclude that next to the ca. 45,000 objects the IMNZ has acquired between 1970 and 1977 there remains “*a minute part of the collection of the former MVIL of 1960, consisting of a lot of pottery and diverse weapons, and a series of small Luluwa sculptures from the former Luluaburg (Kananga) museum that had been transferred for security reasons*”^{cliii}.

On the 7th of December 1965, some ten days after Mobutu’s second and definitive *coup d’état*, the all but sold out museum closes its doors for good^{cliv}. Today the MVIL collection can be found in private and public collections all over the world (Fig. 28)^{clv}.

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Abbreviations

AAAI: Association des Amis de l’Art Indigène

COPAMI : Commission pour la Protection des Arts et Métiers Indigènes

IMNZ : Institut des Musées Nationaux de Zaïre

RMCA : Royal Museum for Central Africa (formerly called Congo Museum (1898) and Museum of Belgian Congo (1910). The present name dates from 1960.

MVIL: Musée de la vie indigène de Léopoldville

Notes

ⁱ Published by Inforcongo, private archive

ⁱⁱ Education in the domain of arts and crafts in Belgian Congo is for the most part in the hands of missionaries who promote the western example, values and techniques. Nevertheless Catholic vocational training for Congolese programs includes also traditional techniques such as weaving raphia, wickerwork, pottery, wood sculpting, dance, storytelling and music but then the focus is on the production of handicraft for the colonial or European markets. (see G. Hulstaert, 1947, p. 11 – 16). For higher education in arts the program is a copy of the program of the Saint Lucas schools in Belgium. Congolese students can graduate as “*artiste décorateur*” in 4 years. A full cycle takes 7 years. The most famous example is the Ecole de Saint Luc in Gombe-Matadi (Leopoldville) that starts in 1943 under the supervision of Father Marc. In the meantime the school war between catholics and free-thinkers rages in the motherland and liberals militate for the valorisation of local traditions in Congo (see J. Raymaekers, 2013, p. 250-251).

ⁱⁱⁱ J. Raymaekers, 2009, p. 57 a.n. See also J. Vanden Bossche, 1955, p. 85: “*It was a bold venture for the time. The Europeans did not readily take to Congolese art, whose strange proportions they attributed to lack of skill in the creators.*”

^{iv} Such as the missionary museum in Kingoye of the Svenska Missionsförbundet in the Lower-Congo, the missionary museum of Scheut in Kangu including a collection of Yombe artefacts, the museum of Mwata Yamvo in Musumba in Katanga showing the ethnography of the Lunda or the famous ethnographical museum of Mweka in the Kasai province, concentrating on the culture of the Kuba. See J. Raymaekers, 2013, p. 247.

^v For the development of the cultural policy in Belgian Congo see S. Van Beurden, 2015, p. 61 a.n.

^{vi} See Inforcongo, 1958, p. 186-187. For a French version see Inforcongo, 1949, p. 280. It shows that also in the 10 years between the two editions the movable heritage was treated stepmotherly.

^{vii} M. Maquet, 1950, p. 98 – 99.

^{viii} L’Exposition Provinciale de Léopoldville, in *Arts et Métiers Indigènes dans la province de Léopoldville*, 1936, fig.2, “*Partie Centrale*”.

^{ix} L’Exposition Provinciale de Léopoldville, in *Arts et Métiers Indigènes dans la province de Léopoldville*, 1936, fig.1, “*l’Ensemble du Stand*”.

^x An instrument promoted by both COPAMI and AAAI is the development of workshops in the countryside where crafts such as sculpture, pottery, weaving and wickerwork are practised following traditional models. The magazine *Artes Africanæ* of COPAMI for example focusses with extensive articles on pottery or weaving, besides long studies on immaterial heritage such as storytelling or symbolism. Over the next decades the AAAI and the MVIL will develop and support the system of the “*Ateliers Sociaux d’Art Indigène*” with local workshops where under colonial supervision handicraft is produced and sold. In the courtyard of the museum of Leopoldville there are workshops of ivory carvers and engravers of calabasses. And in the provinces they support a network of “*ateliers*” of confirmed masters and their apprentices. Their works are sold in the museum shop in Leopoldville and part of the revenue goes to the MVIL. This “*office de vente*” will become one of the financial pillars supporting the museum.

^{xi} Letter of Jeanne Maquet-Tombu to Joseph Maes, 19/10/1938, in file ethn. 1036 RMCA

^{xii} *Coup d’oeil rétrospectif sur l’activité du Comité en 1937*, 1938, p. 1-3.

^{xiii} *Brousse*, 1939, nr. 2, p. 4.

^{xiv} Andre Scohy argues in the museum journal that “*Indigenous art follows closely the development of the society. Art has shown and continues to show a manifest decline parallel to the agony of tribal life ... Congolese art was a functional art, born out of tribal needs and not for purely esthetical reasons. Nowadays the social needs have vanished and consequently former arts and techniques also disappear*” (translation by the author) In A. Scohy, 1948, p. 19.

^{xv} J. Vanden Bossche, 1955, p. 84.

^{xvi} *Les Arts et Métiers Indigènes*, 1938, march-april.

- ^{xvii} For the history of the museum through the eyes of the protagonists see J. Maquet – Tombu, 1950, p. 109 a.n.; *Brousse*, 1956, nr. 8, p. 5; J. Vanden Bossche, 1955, p. 83; M. Maquet, 1950, p. 106.
- ^{xviii} *Comment est née l'Association des Amis de l'Art Indigène*, 1940, p. 5-6.
- ^{xix} “*Pourquoi nous tenons à connaître les noms des artistes et artisans*” in *Arts et Métiers Indigènes dans la province de Léopoldville*, 1938, february, p. 4.
- ^{xx} See for the history of the journals *Arts et Métiers Indigènes dans la province de Léopoldville* and *Brousse*, P. Halen, 1994, p. 68-91.
- ^{xxi} *Brousse*, 1946, 1-2, p. 9.
- ^{xxii} L. Kochnitzky, 1952, p. 16.
- ^{xxiii} L. Kochnitzky, 1952, p. 18. Adrien Vanden Bossche discovers the medium film on a professional basis when he projects propaganda films for the Belgian Army in the outback of Belgian Congo during World War II. He starts making films by himself – first black and white and then colour – of craftsmen, dancers and folkloristic events that got acclaim both in Congo and in Belgium (*Brousse*, 1950, 1, p. 5-7 en *Brousse*, 1952, 2, p. 6).
- ^{xxiv} Marcel Maquet talks about some 10 ivory carvers in 1948 (*Brousse*, 1938, 3-4, p. 16).
- ^{xxv} Photographer unknow, archive Charly Hénault / privat collection.
- ^{xxvi} *Brousse*, 1952, 1, p. 4.
- ^{xxvii} A. Vanden Bossche, 1945, p. 4 – 24.
- ^{xxviii} A. Vanden Bossche, 1945, p. 9.
- ^{xxix} G.-D. Périer, 1948, p. 74.
- ^{xxx} Fig. 7 Inforcongo 91.3/1954/55, archive of the embassy of DR Congo in Brussels.
- ^{xxxi} *Brousse*, 1946, 1-2, p. 9.
- ^{xxxii} The MVIL organises in this way picture shows and lectures in the museum on demand by local schools, and Congolese guides are trained for guiding Congolese school children (*Brousse*, 1953, 4, p. 8 en 1951, 1-2, p. 11). Paul Timmermans for instance with the Museum of Luluaburg also aims explicitly at schools (P. Timmermans, 1959, p. 94).
- ^{xxxiii} Fig. 7 Inforcongo 91.3/1954/55; fig. 12, Inforcongo 36.1/22; fig. 15, Inforcongo 36.1/25; fig. 17, Inforcongo 36.1/26; fig. 23, Inforcongo 36.1/2. All from the archive of the embassy of DR Congo in Brussels.
- ^{xxxiv} J. Vanden Bossche, 1955, p. 84.
- ^{xxxv} *Brousse*, 1953, 4, p. 5.
- ^{xxxvi} In 1956 alone the MVIL organises expositions of the Belgian painters Clodel and Logelain and of the Romanian – Belgian sculptor Janchelevici at the Biennale of Congolese art of the Leopoldville province (an exposition dedicated to the painters and sculptors of Leopoldville), an exposition about the history of Leopoldville and a solo show of the Belgian painter Léon Navez. In the meantime Jean Vanden Bossche, backed by a staff of 5 Congolese, plans to organise each month a temporary exhibition dedicated to a specific region of Belgian Congo and Ruanda Urundi. See *Brousse*, 1957, 10, p. 6 and *Africa*, 1958, 28, 1, January, p. 61.
- ^{xxxvii} *Brousse*, 1952, 2, p. 8.
- ^{xxxviii} Design of the future museum of Leopoldville in *Brousse*, 1951, 1-2, p. 10-11.
- ^{xxxix} *Liste des objets provenant du musée de la vie indigène expédiés en Belgique pour l'expo '58 et remis à monsieur J. Vanden Bossche le 11 aout 1960* in file expo 58, archive RMCA, ethnographic department doc. E. 60/172.
- ^{xl} In the *Catalogus Traditionele Kunst*, 1958, nrs. 329 en 330 and F. Olbrechts, 1958.
- ^{xli} Note of director Lucien Cahen dd. 21/12/1976, Archief RMCA, ethnographic department, file “restitution” and B. Wastiau, 2000, p. 4-5. Where and when those exhibitions took place is not clear.
- ^{xlii} *Arts et Métiers Indigènes dans la province de Léopoldville*, janvier 1938, p. 4.
- ^{xliii} M. Couttenier, 2014, p. 72-101.
- ^{xliv} *Brousse*, 1939, 2, p. 4.
- ^{xlv} *Arts et Métiers Indigènes dans la province de Léopoldville*, february 1938, p. 4 and *Brousse*, 1939, 2, p. 5.
- ^{xlvi} J. Raymaekers, 2013, p. 250 ff.
- ^{xlvi} *Brousse*, 1954, 5, p. 7-8 en S. Van Beurden, 2015, p. 85.
- ^{xlvi} M. Couttenier, 2014, p. 72-101.

^{xlix} See the letter from the management of the Congo museum to the ethnographic department of the fifth of December 1938, file nr. 1036, MVIL, RMCA archives, ethnographic department. In December 1938 the MVIL forwards two crates to the Tervuren Museum with “*pots pertaining to this museum to be exhibited in Antwerp at the occasion of the “Exhibition of the Arts of Fire”*”. The lot consists of twelve pieces of earthenware: three beautiful samples of Longa, Kalu and Zanza pottery from Loanga with their typical mottled decoration, amongst which the largest specimen the MVIL boasts; three jars of which one white from the Lake Leopold II area; six polychrome pieces from the Lusambo province. As the MVIL shop does not have any extraordinary pieces for sale at the time they decide to lend objects from the museum collection proper. The museum’s committee asks Jozef Maes to mention the MVIL for giving these items on loan (letter from J. Maquet-Tombu to J. Maes dated October 19th 1938 and letter E.38/676 of December 114th 1938 from the section head of the ethnographic department to the curator of the Congo Museum in file nr. 1036, MVIL, archives of the RMCA ethnographic department. This file contains only four documents, all from 1938). But even though the objects are on loan, they are registered as part of the Tervuren Congo Museum’s collection under numbers 38403 to 38414. They are still in Tervuren now. And there are more earthenware items in the RMCA collection that have an MVIL background: Numbers 38327 (by Mpangi of the Eboli-Nsiele workshop in the Lake Leopold II region) and 38325 (by François Ilonga from the same region) mention Adrien Vanden Bossche as donator. In November 1938 the latter also donates a calabash by Madiya Kitombe.

ⁱ Brousse, 1951, 1-2, p. 5-6.

ⁱⁱ Brousse, 1948, 3-4, p. 4.

ⁱⁱⁱ M. Couttenier, 2014, p. 90-92.

^{liii} S. Van Beurden, 2015, p. 85 – 88.

^{liv} There is also a Belgian current asking that attention be paid to “popular art”. An protagonist here is journalist Gaston-Denis Périer, a founding member of COPAMI and the driving force behind the magazine *Artes Africanae*. He teaches at the colonial schools of Brussels and Antwerp and since the twenties he writes with fervour about Congo. His 1948 booklet “*Les arts populaires du Congo Belge*” begins with dance and music and takes the reader via weaving, wickerwork, pottery, ceramics and architecture to masks and power figures, and ends his tour with the European influences and painting. He also is an staunch champion of “the contemporary art of the black people of Belgian Congo” and in *Artes Africanae* writes about the first generation of Congolese painters like Lubaki and Djilatendo, who have their first exhibition in the Brussels Palace for Fine Arts as early as 1929 ((G.-D. Périer, 1936, pp. 4 -13). When in 1955 Albert Maesen sets out on a wide-ranging expedition to collect ethnographica and namely everyday utensils for the Tervuren museum, Brousse states, not without a measure of acerbity, that collectors and musea used to be mainly interested in objects with artistic merit while neglecting everyday objects, although the latter are the more representative of the studied culture (Brousse, 1955, 6, p.4).

^{lv} Publicist Gaston-Denis Périer welcomes in *Artes Africanae*, the journal of COPAMI, the coming of the MVIL “*in accordance with the colonial policies of Belgium*” (translation by the author). He also sketches how the first generations of colonials collected objects for musea in the “motherland” and states that one cannot find exceptional pieces in the MVIL such as “*impressive masks and headrests of Egyptian style one can admire in the Museum of Tervuren*”. On the other hand the MVIL “*will preserve on-site bits of old statuary, minor arts and typical examples of indigenous crafts of Congo*” (translation by the author) in G.-D. Périer, 1936, p. 3.

^{lvi} For the importance of Olbrechts and his vision on the art of Congo see C. Petridis, 2001. Marc Leo Felix sketches the evolution of the taste of collectors of Congolese art in in M. Felix, 2010, p. 61-67.

^{lvii} As can be seen for example on the photographs of the visit of Minister Albert De Vleeschauwer at the museum that are conserved in the RMCA. Also Leon Kochnitzky in his survey of ethnological and folk art museums in Central Africa expands enthusiastically about the section of the Kuba in the MVIL (L. Kochnitzky, 1952, p. 17 – 18).

^{lviii} Inforcongo 36.1/10, archive of the embassy of the RD Congo in Brussels

^{lix} Catalogue of the “Exposition of Collector’s Items” in *Arts et Métiers Indigènes dans la province de Léopoldville*, 1938, march-april, p. 9-29.

^{lx} *Arts et Métiers Indigènes dans la province de Léopoldville*, 1938, may, p. 4.

^{lxi} At some occasions members of AAAI show their disapproval when objects are stolen or acquired under force. There is indignation when father Hulstaert reports that a well known mansize statue at the border of

the Lomela river has disappeared. Jeanne Maquet-Tombu mentions an unfortunate incident when a man during a study trip takes a nicely carved piece of ivory away under duress from the owner in exchange for an old umbrella. In *Arts et Métiers Indigènes dans la province de Léopoldville*, 1938, november, p. 16.

^{lxii} *Arts et Métiers Indigènes dans la province de Léopoldville*, 1938, june, p. 5.

^{lxiii} *Arts et Métiers Indigènes dans la province de Léopoldville*, 1938, november, p. 7.

^{lxiv} S. Van Beurden, 2015, p. 129 notes when visiting the IMNC in Kinshasa that there remain some fragments of the inventory file and some photographs as well as the last visitor's book. Also Boris Wastiau has seen some remnants of the old inventory of the MVIL (communication by email).

^{lxv} *Liste des objets provenant du musée de la vie indigène expédiés en Belgique pour l'expo '58 et remis à monsieur J. Vanden Bossche le 11 aout 1960* in file Expo 58, archive RMCA ethnographic department doc. E. 60/172.

^{lxvi} An image of a Yombe statue with number L.E. 655.S is reproduced in B. Wastiau, 2000, p. 4. The same statue figures as "Statuette avec réceptacle Mayombe" on the list of the 32 objects lent by the MVIL for the World's Fair in Brussels in 1958.

^{lxvii} fig. 12, Inforcongo 36.1/22; fig. 15, Inforcongo 36.1/25; fig. 17, Inforcongo 36.1/26; fig. 23, Inforcongo 36.1/2; all from the archive of the embassy of the RD Congo in Brussels.

^{lxviii} J. Maquet – Tombu, 1936, p. 5- 10 en fig. 1 en 2.

^{lxix} Letter of Tanghe in *Brousse*, 1939, p. 8. This statue is also reproduced in L.Kochnitzky, 1952, p. 19 and shows there the number L.E.65.

^{lxx} *Brousse*, 1954, 5, p. 13.

^{lxxi} *Arts et Métiers Indigènes dans la province de Léopoldville*, 1938, november, p. 5.

^{lxxii} *Arts et Métiers Indigènes dans la province de Léopoldville*, 1938, november, p. 8 illustrated with a drawing of the object. The Kikongo name is "nlunga tsongo" and the object reportedly is the work of the artist Mbuani Kombo who died around 1900.

^{lxxiii} *Brousse*, 1940, 2, p. 3 with a drawing of the object.

^{lxxiv} *Brousse*, 1953, 4, p. 4 and *Brousse*, 1956, 9, p. 15. Also see J. Vanden Bossche, 1955, p. 84.

^{lxxv} Illustration in R. Thompson and J. Cornet, 1982, p. 63 and 226. This object is in 1982 still part of the collection of the IMNZ in Kinshasa.

^{lxxvi} For an extensive discussion on niombo see A. Reikat, 1990, p. 21 a.n.

^{lxxvii} On the series of photographs of the expositions in the Near East during world war II (in A. Vanden Bossche, 1945, p. 4 – 24) as well as on a photograph of the exhibition of 1935 (in *Arts et métiers indigènes dans la province de Léopoldville*, 1936, march, fig. 2) figure niombo puppets. Makoza is the most famous author of niombo puppets during the twenties and the thirties of the 20th century.

^{lxxviii} Photographer unknown, archive Charly Hénault / private collection.

^{lxxix} Inforcongo 36.1/25, archive of the embassy of the RD Congo in Brussels.

^{lxxx} See L. de Sousberghe, 1958, fig. 273 for a comparable example. L. de Sousberghe, 1958, p. 150-151 writes about a "nzinda" that he says to be rare. He gives a description of the njinda in the collection of the Jesuits and refers at that occasion to the piece in de MVIL collection.

^{lxxxi} W. De Mahieu, 2015, p. 50-51.

^{lxxxii} J. Maquet – Tombu, 1936, march, p. 8 en fig. 2.

^{lxxxiii} Photographer unknown, Charly Hénault / private collection.

^{lxxxiv} L. de Sousberghe, 1959 : The reproductions are numbered 7 (a tundu mask that also appears on a photograph of a museum room in 1938), 8 (a tundu mask), 15 (a mbangu mask), 16 (a galusumba mask or the mask of a birdhunter), 31 (a kizele mask), 47 (a kangema mask or the mask of a winemaker, also reproduced in De Smet, P. 1999 : 103), 90 (a kangema mask), 174 (two mihango or palaver staff), 175 (a muhango), 176 (a muhango), 177 (two Suku of Yaka staffs) and 264 (a beaker in pottery).

^{lxxxv} *Brousse*, 1945, p. 5. Leon Kochnitzky publishes 3 pende masks from the MVIL collection in L. Kochnitzky, 1953, p. 8.

^{lxxxvi} *De kunst in Belgisch Congo en in Ruanda-Urundi*, 1950, ill. 20. Photograph of A. Scohy.

^{lxxxvii} List of objects in J. Vanden Bossche, 1950, 2, p. 9 and in J. Vanden Bossche, 1951, p. 167-174. He discusses among others the statue of a standing woman named Kangulundu from the region of Gungu. It's the work of the then still living sculpture Kihulu-Zéba and property of a chief; it is used for protection against evil spirits. The same sculptor is the author of a palaver staff with a sculpture of a woman named Mohango, made between 1910 and 1920 (fig. 130). Another staff is the work of Kihulu dated 1946 (fig.

131). A tobacco mortar in the same style is the work of Lumbili – aged 35 at that time – dated 1938 (1fig. 32). Two carytid chairs show affinity with statues of squatted persons of the Tshokwe neighbours (Fig. 136-137) in the collection of the MVIL. It leads Jean Vanden Bossche to reflect about the artistic influences between different people such as the Pende, Tshokwe and Luluwa.

^{lxxxviii} Brousse, 1955, 6, p. 4.

^{lxxxix} L. Kochnitzky, 1953, p. 9 with illustrations of 3 pendants

^{xc} Carlo Lamote, Inforcongo. 36.1/26, Archive of the embassy of the RD Congo in Brussels.

^{xcⁱ} B. de Rachewiltz, 1967, fig. 6.

^{xcⁱⁱ} Communication of Bruno Claessens via email.

^{xcⁱⁱⁱ} One of them is reproduced in J. Raymaekers, 2010, p. 56.

^{xc^{iv}} Brousse, 1956, 8, p. 5.

^{xc^v} Brousse, 1939, 1, p. 11.

^{xc^{vi}} Brousse, 1956, 8, p. 11.

^{xc^{vii}} *Arts et Métiers Indigènes dans la province de Léopoldville*, 1938, November, p. 6.

^{xc^{viii}} For fig 18 – 20 : Photographer unknown, Charly Hénault / private collection.

^{xc^{ix}} Photographer Hans Himmelheber, Himmelheber Archive, Rietberg Museum, Zürich by kind permission of Dr. Michaela Oberhofer.

^c *Arts et Métiers Indigènes dans la province de Léopoldville*, 1938, June-July, p. 4.

^{cⁱ} *Arts et Métiers Indigènes dans la province de Léopoldville*, 1938, June-July, p. 6 for the mweelu and matemba masks and *Arts et Métiers Indigènes dans la province de Léopoldville*, 1938, November, p. 5 for the mbawa mask and the wooden Suku mask. See also H. Himmelheber, 1939, p. 19-39. The book Zaire, 1993, p. 28 shows on a field photograph of Hans Himmelheber the maskhouse of the Kibubu village with in the foreground the mentioned mask, together with a kakuungu and a mweelu mask.

^{cⁱⁱ} According to Jules Volper the matemba mask (or kazeza) is the female counterpart of kakuungu. They look the same but the matemba mask is smaller than the kakuungu. Both appear at the end of the initiation camp on which occasion the assistant of the camp leader wears the matemba mask. But the distinction between both masks is not evident. There are kazeza masks of 35 up to 90 centimeters in height. J. Volper, 2015, p. 96.

^{cⁱⁱⁱ} H. Himmelheber, 1939, p. 19-39.

^{c^{iv}} ^{c^v} The article of Himmelheber dated 1939 shows field photographs of the author and some illustrations of mbala and mwelo masks of the Yaka originating from the book of J. Maes, *Aniota kifwebe* with clichés from the publisher De Sikkel. They are not part of the MVIL collection.

^{c^v} Photographer unknown, Charly Hénault / private collection.

^{c^{vi}} Photographer unknown, Charly Hénault / private collection.

^{c^{vii}} Communication of Dr. Michaela Oberhofer. The mask is also published in A. Bourgeois, 1991, p. 19-32.

^{c^{viii}} C. Roy, 1997, p. 379 and fig.130. According to Dr. Michaela Oberhofer of the Rietbergmuseum in Zurich that conserves the Himmelheber archive, the mask is now in the Weltkulturen Museum of Basel where it is attributed to Himmelheber (as collector). The same mask is shown by A. Bourgeois in his article *Kakuungu among the Yaka and Suku* in *African Arts*, 1980, nr. 1, p. 43.

^{c^{ix}} C. Roy, 1997, p. 377 and fig. 127 and the catalogue of Sotheby's, *African, Oceanic and Pre-Columbian art*, 2008, May 16 : lot 167.

^{c^x} Reproduced in Sura Dji, *Visages et racines du Zaïre*, Musée des Arts Décoratifs, 1982, fig. 3.23.

^{c^{xi}} Inforcongo 36.1/2, archive of the embassy of the RD Congo in Brussels.

^{c^{xii}} The mask is reproduced in Sura Dji, 1982: 64 and ill. 3.23. According to the catalogue, the mask has been sent to Brussels for the World's Fair of 1958 and came back to Kinshasa in 1977. But the Kweze mask does not appear as such on the list of objects that the MRAC in 1960 hands over again to Jean Vanden Bossche. Perhaps it is mistakenly labelled as a mask of the Suku. It is striking that according to the Sura Dji catalogue only two pieces of the old MVIL collection are presented in the Paris exhibition namely the famous mwana pwo mask of the Tshokwe that adorns also the cover of the catalogue and the Kweze mask. In other expositions of the IMNZ abroad in the United States, Canada and Germany according to the registration numbers specified in the respective catalogues no objects are exhibited that were registered before 1970.

^{c^{xiii}} Brousse, 1947, 3-4, p. 6. Carlo Lamote photographs in 1954 for Inforcongo some statues that are attributed to the Mbala with registration numbers 420.S, 424.S, 428.S and 429.S (without the L.E. prefix) and a Pindi statue with number L.E. 202.S all in the archive of the embassy of the RD Congo in Brussels.

^{c^{xiv}} M. Maquet, 1937, 3, p.1-3.

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- ^{cxv} Sura Dji, 1982, p. 72-73 and ill. 3.40. This mask is also reproduced in the book of the photographer E. Elisofon, 1955, ill. 287 (with text by William Fagg, conservator of the Museum of Mankind/British Museum in London).
- ^{cxvi} The mask figures on the list of ICOM of Stolen and Missing Works of Art and Cultural Goods see ICOM, 1994, p. 81.
- ^{cxvii} Brousse, 1939, 1, p. 11 and a comprehensive article by H. Himmelheber, 1939, 3, p. 17 – 31.
- ^{cxviii} J. Vanden Bossche, 1951, p. 173 and ill. 133, 134, 135.
- ^{cxix} Photographer unknown, private collection.
- ^{cxx} J. Maquet-Tombu, 1936, March, p. 8 – 9: “Thanks to a late penetration of the region, traditions are conserved intactly by the Bankanu population and indigenous art is still very lively there” (translation by the author).
- ^{xxi} As Mieke Van Damme –Linseele points out in a personal communication, Mfumu-Tseban is most likely the famous sculptor and blacksmith Nsebani who was born in Kipindi at the end of the 19th century. See also A. Van Damme–Linseele, 1999 p. 57-61.
- ^{xxii} J. Maquet-Tombu, 1936, March, p. 9 ff.
- ^{xxiii} At least some of these Nkanu panels are already part of the museum collection in 1936 as they appear in fig. 1 in J. Maquet – Tombu, 1936, March, ill. 1. For a comprehensive study of comparable Nkanu panels and statues see A. Van Damme-Linseele, 2001, p. 189-210.
- ^{xxiv} List of acquisitions in *Arts et Métiers Indigènes dans la province de Léopoldville*, 1938, november, p. 5.
- ^{xxv} Photographer not mentioned, 1946, Inforcongo, 36.1/2, archive of the embassy of the RD Congo in Brussels.
- ^{xxvi} Inforcongo, note at the backside of the photograph of J. Mulders, 31/226.10 in the archive of the embassy of the RD Congo in Brussels.
- ^{xxvii} Brousse, 1950, p. 8.
- ^{xxviii} A. Vanden Bossche, 1952, p.11-26.
- ^{xxix} Donations of Henri Schouteden (at that time director of the Congo museum of Tervuren) In *Arts et Métiers Indigènes dans la province de Léopoldville*, 1938, february, p. 6.
- ^{xxx} *Arts et Métiers Indigènes dans la province de Léopoldville*, 1938, february, p. 6.
- ^{xxxi} Also Leon Kochnitzky in his overview of musea in Central Africa is charmed by this statue. He reproduces a statue of a kneeling woman in his book (L. Kochnitzky, 1952, p. 17-19). But it is more likely that it refers to the statue reproduced in Brousse, 1952, 1, p. 17 together with 14 other objects of the Kuba in the MVIL collection.
- ^{xxxii} One of the Kuba Bushoong masks of the MVIL collection is reproduced in E. Elisofon, 1955, p. 207 and ill. 261.
- ^{xxxiii} Brousse, 1950, 2, p. 5.
- ^{xxxiv} Photographer not mentioned, private collection.
- ^{xxxv} Brousse, 1939, 2, p. 5.
- ^{xxxvi} Brousse, 1946, 3-4, p. 15.
- ^{xxxvii} *Arts et Métiers Indigènes dans la province de Léopoldville*, Une salle de l’Uele au Musée de la Vie Indigène, 1937, p. 3.
- ^{xxxviii} P. Lenk-Chevich, 1946, 1-2, p. 13-19.
- ^{xxxix} Brousse, 1946, 3-4, p. 16.
- ^{cxl} Brousse, 1951, 2, p. 9-10.
- ^{cxli} Photographer not mentioned, Inforcongo, 36.14, archive of the embassy of RD Congo in Brussels
- ^{cxlii} *Arts et Métiers Indigènes dans la province de Léopoldville*, 1938, juni, p. 5 – 7
- ^{cxliii} Brousse, 1940, 1, p. 3.
- ^{cxliv} Brousse, 1940, 4, p. 7. The supposed link between Pharaonic Egypt and Central Africa is an old theory that fits in the diffusionist vision of the 19th century. Maarten Couttenier discusses diffusionism and its counterpart evolutionism in the context of African culture extensively in his book *Congo tentoongesteld*, 2005.

^{cxlv} G. Hulstaert, 1959 for the historical survey – the first specimen of this type of coffin is published as early as 1906 – and a very exhaustive description of the MVIL specimen. According to the author, since the forties such coffins were made expressly for the museums and exhibitions by craftsman Paul Bosenja and others. The Eleku coffin in the Quai Branly collection for instance, which was bought from art dealer Marc Felix, bears a striking resemblance to the MVIL coffin. The Coquilhatville museum, which opens in 1957 also boasts ‘*a coffin, such as were still carved by old men along the river*’, donated to the museum by Father Hulstaert. There was a second ‘*anthropomorphous coffin made near the airfield*’ (translations by the author). This particular piece is said to have been sent to Dakar in 1966 for the first *Festival mondial des arts nègres*. Apparently it remained there and then vanished (see the testimonial of the head of the Coquilhatville department of political, administrative and juridical affairs, J. Niset, 1990, p. 440-442).

^{cxlvi} Brousse, 1940, 4, p. 9. Francois Neyt writes in the catalogue of Christies Paris on the occasion of the sale of the efomba sarcophagus from the Mestach collection: *The sarcophagus of the Mestach collection was acquired in a Brussels antique shop, after the 1940-45 war. It is very likely that this antiquarian is G. Dehondt. The latter sold to the Musée de l'Homme in Paris the Nkundu sarcophagus efomba, now in the Musée du Quai Branly under reference number 73.1992 .0.1. In this connection, Miss Huguette Van Geluwe from the Royal Museum for Central Africa in Tervuren wrote to Mrs Delange (of the Musée de l'Homme in Parijs), in a letter from November 19th 1970, that the sarcophagus came from this well-known antique dealer and has been photographed by R.F. Boelaert in 1940* in F. Neyt, 2012, lot 79.

^{cxlvii} Brousse, 1940, 4, p. 5.

^{cxlviii} J. Volper, 2011, p. 108-117.

^{cxlix} S. Van Beurden, 2015, p. 129 en 304.

^{cl} Note E. 63/44 of Albert Maesen to the director of the MRAC of March 25 1963 in the file “restitution” in the archive of the ethnography department of the MRAC.

^{cli} Note E. 63/45 of H. Van Geluwe to the director of the RMCA of March 1963 in the file “restitution” in the archive of the ethnography department of the MRAC.

^{clii} *Keepers that were poorly prepared and disinclined to cultural values, simply sold everything that could be sold to strangers* (translation by the author) in J. Cornet, 1984, p. 84.

^{cliii} *Rapport sur la mission effectuée à Kinshasa (I.M.N.Z.) de 29 janvier au 13 février 1977* by Albert Maesen in the file “restitution” of the archive of the ethnography department of the MRAC. One has to be aware that neither Albert Maesen nor his assistant Huguette Van Geluwe were partisans of the return of objects of the RMCA to Kinshasa. One can find a comparable testimony for the museum of Luluaburg in J. Raymaekers, 2013, p. 99.

^{cliv} S. Van Beurden, 2015, p. 129 and 304.

^{clv} This Yaka figure with the reference L.E. 2023 – S on its base was found in april 2018 on a fleemarket in Waterloo near Brussels and is now part of a private collection.

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